

God Is Great, God Is Good
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany - Year B - 02/07/2021
Psalm Reading: 147:1-11, 20c
1st Reading: Mark 1:29-39 , 2nd: Isa. 40:21-31

On Friday morning I walked up the hill to the church. It was a cold, icy day. The snow had laid down four or five inches over night. At the church I dug a spindly path over the sidewalk to the north door and put down some salt. I knew Kyle would be there in about half an hour to wield the snow blower, and lay down enough salt that everyone coming into any entrance would be safe and dry, but I wanted to make sure it was clear enough for anyone who might show up before then.

After shoveling, I made some tea, said a few prayers and went to work replying to emails that had come in over night and organizing for the day ahead. I heard footsteps coming up the hall by my office and I called out. "Good Morning." I knew it was Kyle, I was not expecting anyone else at this early hour. I got the same response in reply. And then as he passed by my door I said "Snow". And the response to that was, "Yup, Snow." And then he walked on to the boiler room to start his day as the church's custodian.

Now, in that brief conversation, in fact, in the single word, "Snow", much was said. I was saying to Kyle that I hoped he'd had an uneventful drive to the church, after all it was cold and slippery on the roads. I was implying that as Michiganders living in Alpena that we were sharing an experience that bound us together in a way that said we are part of the same community,

a community that knows how to deal with adversity as we see snow quite often here.

The word also hinted at action. We both knew that he would spend at least an hour or two clearing walks, salting, and making sure that the facility was safe for anyone who might come by. So there was no need to say more than that single word.

We can say a lot in very few words, but I think it requires common experience, common understanding for it to be effective. As Christians we have quite a few words that are freighted with meaning, “church, spirit, fellowship, mission, the Word” and so on... But there is one single syllable that seems to stand above all others for us, and that syllable is, “God”. This is because God is the focus of all we do. And I think our reading from Isaiah begins to touch on this very idea. Our reading from Isaiah reaches out to try to explain just who our God is.

Isaiah in verse 21 of Chapter 40 says, *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded?”* Isaiah begins by hinting at the common experience of all humanity, as if our understanding of the subject he is about to broach is basic and fundamental, innate even to our very being. So the word “God” takes its meaning. It describes a person whose nature many of us, as people of God, have been taught since birth. But beyond this, we should at least have an inkling or understanding of who God is from the very construct of the world that surrounds us. Our God is (and this is just one aspect of God) the “Creator-God” and this is manifest to us through the creation.

And this leads us to contemplate the awesome wonder of God. Isaiah writes, *“He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers.”* (v.22a) Now in this we see the aloof God, the God whose power is so great that we humans cannot compare with it except as insignificant insects. God is so lofty that *“the Lord stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.”*(v.22b) Yes, God is so great that even the magnificent sky can barely contain the majesty. In the same way a tent of a wandering nomad is no more than a shelter for the night, when he awakes the wide landscape all around is there for his use. He can travel wide and far in thought and deed, with no hindrance from a mere grasshopper than might wander before his path.

In fact, the greatest among us are so insignificant that God *“brings princes to naught and reduces rulers to nothing.”* Isaiah pounds this into us, now comparing humans to plants in a field. He says, *“No sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.”* And so we get that picture of ourselves as mere mortals, and God as an infinite being for whom time stretches forever, from before the world began until the end when there will be a new Heaven and a new earth.

As we contemplate the meaning of the word “God” we are beginning to see this remote being, untouchable, unreachable, so far above us that we cannot hope to get the Lord’s attention. Because if we were this magnificent being, would we pay attention to someone or some creature as low and as insignificant as ourselves in our present state? When you walk

down a sidewalk, to do you avoid kicking over anthills, or after a rain do you pick up a worm that has strayed into the middle of the sidewalk to escape the flood, to return the poor creature to a grassy sward where it can return to the dark soil, to its natural abode? I actually do this, but one day on a wet morning in the fall, coming into the church in the morning, the sidewalks were littered with squirming worms, and I picked up one, and then a second and a third. I tossed them into the grass, but after twenty minutes of this and watching more venture out onto the sidewalk, I despaired and gave up trying to save them all. It was impossible. Is this what God is like?

As Christians, we should know that the word “God” means so much more than a God of power. Yes, God is great, far beyond us in strength, and in infinity of time. But since God is not limited, as are we humans, God has the capacity, the will, and the desire to care for us. God has the power, far beyond our capabilities. God can take all of us lowly worms and toss us into the grass, saving us from our own worst instincts, even when we crawl back on to the side walk over and over, where we would be stranded, baked by the hot sun of mid-day.

So when we question God’s love. When we suppose God to be aloof, Isaiah asks, *“Why do you complain, Jacob?”* (Note that we are Jacob and Israel here.) *“Why do you say, Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is disregarded by my God’?”* How could our way be hidden from an all powerful God? It is precisely because of God’s infinite power that God can and does watch over us, that God can and does care for us.

So Isaiah again questions the fundamental basis of how we know. He asks again, *“Do you not know? Have you not heard?”*

Know what? Heard what? That *“the Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.”* (v.28) This is why he will not give up on us. For God *“will not grow tired or weary...”* and God knows what is going on with us even though *“his understanding no one can fathom.”*

As Isaiah tells us, (v.29) *“He gives strength to the weary, and increases the power of the weak.”* And in a flight of poetic language we find out what God can do for us in the here and now. He writes (v.31), *“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”*

So, we find out just a little bit about what this word “God” means when we speak it out. When we say it in sorrow, or despair, in praise or in thanksgiving. It is first, in acknowledgment of God’s infinite greatness, and second, it reflects an understanding of how that infinitude, how that greatness enables our God to be a personal God, loving, caring for, strengthening, uplifting, saving, each and every one of us.

But, my friends, we have barely scratched the surface of what this word “God” means to us. We have not discussed the three person’s of God. We have not discussed God as the God of history, the God of justice, the Lord of Hosts, the Saving God, and so much more. I will leave investigation of these aspects of God for another time because my friends, a lifetime is not long enough to truly learn all that there is to know about God, and that is just those things that are accessible to us through reading God’s Word.

“God”, it is such a simple word, only three letters, a single syllable. But I ask you, based on your experience, based on

your reading, based on your reason, based on the traditions handed down to you, *“Do you not know? Have you not heard?”* this word “God” thousands of times. You know in your heart what it truly means, but often in the moment we do not understand its height, its depth, its magnitude, Really how could we? So when you hear it or say it take that moment to contemplate God and you will get just a little closer to coming to an understanding of that meaning.

So, when you are in everyday conversation and someone just says “God” out of nowhere, perhaps the best response would be to be like Kyle last Friday morning when I said “snow”. He responded, “yup”. Because it is never wrong to call on God, in praise or for help. When you say “Yup, God.” you are acknowledging an understanding of that, acknowledge that you have faith in common. And if someone asks you what you mean by saying “yup”, you can explain what the word “God” means to you.

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