

Job 38

1 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: 2“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? 3Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

4“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. 5Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? 6On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone 7when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? 8“Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?— 9when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, 10and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, 11and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped’?

12“Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, 13so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? 14It is changed like clay under the seal, and it is dyed like a garment. 15Light is withheld from the wicked, and their uplifted arm is broken. 16“Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? 17Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? 18Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?

Declare, if you know all this. 19“Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, 20that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home? 21Surely you know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great! 22“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, 23which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war? 24What is the way to the place where the light is distributed, or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

25“Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, 26to bring rain on a land where no one lives, on the desert, which is empty of human life, 27to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass? 28“Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew? 29From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven? 30The waters become hard like stone, and the face of the deep is frozen. 31“Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of

Orion? 32Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children? 33Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth? 34“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you? 35Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we are’? 36Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind? 37Who has the wisdom to number the clouds? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, 38when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together? 39“Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, 40when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert? 41Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?

Psalm 133

1How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

2It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes.

3It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore.

Make Us One
The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee
June 20, 2021

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

As a writer, I often spend a lot of time thinking about titles. As a teacher of writing, I often urged my students to consider carefully the title that would lead their readers to understand the overall point they were trying to make. So, I smiled this week when Amy let me know that I had forgotten to send her a sermon title as part of the bulletin. Since much of its content kept circling back to the first line of Psalm 133 and since the songs Ann and I chose to include as part of worship were about unity, I went with the title of the song she asked me to record. That said, I want you to know the several titles and topics that have vied for use this morning.

You may consider them a kind of an outline of this morning's message if you'd like.

One was Social Contract Theory, because while it is so good for people to live together in unity, it is also very difficult, wouldn't you say? A second was "Why Worship?". A third was "Why Come to Church?". All of these ideas swirled fairly significantly, and the questions were more decidedly connected to what all of you have said that you hope for as Blue Hill's community church. So, I want to tell you a couple of stories. I think they are about our church today and what and who we hope to be. They are about why I hope to see you all in worship regularly as we seek to make a difference in our own lives, in the lives of others on the Blue Hill Peninsula; in what I like to call more broadly, our corner of the Kin-dom of God.

A friend used to tell this story of a parishioner in her church. There was an elderly gentleman (whom I think of as Ollie because of a dear man in my first congregation who had that name) who came to church *every single week*, always sitting in the sixth row back on the left side, midway toward the middle of the pew. While there were many members of the church who were similarly dedicated to being present for worship, Ollie was most steadily so. Each morning he would walk through the door, he would smile as he shook the hands of each person he passed on his way to his regular place in the sanctuary. My friend was moved by his devotion and so asked him one day what it was that he got from worship that made him so consistent in his attendance. Was it the music? Was it the sermon or maybe praying together? Ollie nodded a bit in response to each question, but after she had posed them all, he said, "Those are all wonderful parts of being here, but I really come each week because someone may need me."

Someone may need me . . .

I headed north and eventually farther Downeast this weekend for an errand in Calais. Because I had never been to that part of Maine before, Mark and I spent my day off Friday in a trip to Lubec. Because we accidentally locked ourselves

out of the room at an inn there, the one local on the staff, the chef, had to pop over to let us in. Mark plied him with questions about the community, and he noted particularly how quiet the town gets in winter. Friends and family of mine speak of Blue Hill the same way, somewhat incredulous at my delight in having landed here. But, small town community has incredible appeal and I am learning about it as we come out of our homes in the easing of pandemic restrictions. We make choices as we create community, and I delight in the message of Psalm 133. Other aspects of the Psalm are less directly about this idea of unity and what I sometimes think of as “mutual aid,” so we may want to spend a moment on this Song of Ascent. The final line recalls the way in which the dew of Mount Hermon gathers in the summer, bringing moisture to the dry plains in a familiar way. I am sure that our neighbors in the west of our country would pray for this blessing today. How might we aid them?

Small towns are comprised of individuals who have committed to mutual aid. I learned so much from teaching philosophy, never having really studied it formally until then, and in order to make sense of it for high school students. You don't have to read Hobbes, or Rousseau or Locke to know that individuals don't fare well in nature, and that it is difficult for groups of people to get along. There are always concessions that are made. Civilization as we know it means that the group benefits only as much as individuals are committed to compromise. Unity demands it of us. Love demands it of us. So, in small towns and in families, we look at each other to know how others need us. We don't freak out at our differences, but try to understand them, and we don't make mountains out of molehills. If every difference between us were cause for rupture, were cause for dislike or even hatred, we would have no unity. Our differences are that great. Our similarities are greater, and to raise them up requires a conscious choice.

A favorite author of mine, first as a kid and later as an adult and particularly as a student of theology, is Madeleine L'Engle. Back to reading for fun off the shelves of our own church library this week, I expected some of the familiar themes she addresses: good vs. evil, sure. Packed into this novel about time travel and druids is significant theological postulation, and one passage in particular seeks to

understand why it is that we have such squabbling among different peoples. Land grabs, fighting over resources. Scarcity and fear. These are the state of nature that led to our entering into social contracts and formal governments. With the question of how we live as church in front of me much of the time these days, I invite you to ask a different question about gathering together.

What brings us together as Church? What are the choices we make even more consciously as people who gather in Jesus' name. We are committed to unity: we celebrate it with our sacraments, we enjoin it in our prayers, we come to it initially because we believe what God shares in his long harangue of sorts to Job. Then, What is our response to God's infinite greatness and creative power? Worship, and to respond to something, to someone as great as this asks of us several things: awe, praise, and thanks. Then, because we know God's love for us, we are asked to love one another. And it looks like forgiveness and it looks like mercy—for everyone. That was the point in reading L'Engle's book, *An Acceptable Time*, that I was glad for reasons beyond entertainment. Woven throughout the story is her strong advocating for forgiveness as the chief ideal of civilized peoples. Woven into each individual's character development is a personal battle between more base instincts of survival and decision making in favor of a more general good.

Where L'Engle actually delves into the important theological questions that have challenged people of faith throughout time, she continually returns to the issue of forging relationships in families, with friends and in larger community. So, as I read, I found myself thinking again about the chef in Lubec and thinking about Blue Hill. In getting to know people here in our town government, in our various churches and the many people who do not consciously participate in either of these organizations, I would like for us to continue our conversations about and our commitment to knowing the truths around which we have unity. The particular divisions between us are softened and even can be erased when we look for those larger truths.

Having been called here to explore with you the ways we continue to forge community among a socially diverse population, I am grateful for conversations

around the most elemental aspects of our faith. I begin to understand with increasing clarity that we celebrate God's greatness, even calling up images like those in our passage from Job this morning. As a church founded on and nurtured by faith in Jesus, we also celebrate the unique way in which we are called to love—not in self-service, but in servanthood. At one point in the novel I am reading, a physician is skeptical of the plot elements that are part of the story's fantasy. Disbelief is not her greater challenge, and it is not our greatest challenge in forming religious community, either. Dr. Louise says at one point, "I'm a doctor, Polly, not a theologian, and lots of Christian dogma seems to me no more than barnacles encrusting a great rock. I don't think that God demanded that Jesus shed blood unwillingly. With anguish, yes, but with love. Whatever we give, we have to give *out of love*. That, I believe, is the nature of God."

Whatever we give, we have to give out of love. That, I believe, is the nature of Church. Our God who loves us has asked that we gather in faith, in love and in unity. For those of us who aspire to follow Jesus, we look for unity and for love in all things. What a blessing. Let us pray:

Oh, loving God, give us the insight and the will to live together in unity, responding to your love for us with love for one another. Amen.