

# The Voice of Faith

Sermon for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 21 October 2018.

Job 38:1-7, 34-41; Psalm 104:1-9, 25; Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:34-45.

Any fans of *The Simpsons*? If you've watched the series you know that the baby, Maggie, does not speak. She makes little gurgles and sucking sounds on her pacifier. She occasionally spells words with blocks. She also speaks in dreams or the Halloween horror special. But she hardly ever speaks in normal episodes.

But in one episode when Maggie finally said the word, "Daddy," Elizabeth Taylor did the voice.

Throughout most of the book of Job, God has been silent. God and Satan talked together at the beginning. God agreed to allow Job to suffer, but God was confident Job would endure faithfully. From then on Job and his friends did all the talking. Until the part of Job we read today. These words are God's first words in response to Job's situation.

And while Job was waiting for this moment what God actually said came as a surprise. Job had asked for something like legal hearing. Job laid out his case like a legal argument. He had suffered terribly. He and his friends all believed that suffering of this type was justifiable punishment. People who do bad things suffer the consequences. People like Job who do good things are not supposed to suffer. Job's friends were convinced Job must have done something wrong. They encouraged Job to confess it so that God could forgive him, wipe the slate clean, and end Job's suffering. But Job was convinced he had done nothing wrong and did not deserve what was happening. He begged for a chance to make his case before God.

And finally, 38 chapters later, God showed up to testify. But God did not attempt to answer Job's questions. Instead, God asked a series of questions that put Job in his place.

*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?*

*Who determined its measurements – surely you know!*

When I imagine who might play this voice, I'm not hearing George Burns or Morgan Freeman, both of whom played God quite beautifully. I'm not even hearing the majestic James Earl Jones. This voice to me sounds more like Tyler Perry's Madea. No-nonsense, a little exasperated, full of love and survival. God continued -

*'Have you commanded the morning since your days began,  
and caused the dawn to know its place, (Job 38:12)*

*'Have you entered into the springs of the sea,  
or walked in the recesses of the deep? (Job 38:16)  
'Where is the way to the dwelling of light . . .  
Surely you know, for you were born then,  
and the number of your days is great! (Job 38:19-21)*

God went on and on like this for four chapters. At one point Job interrupted to explain that he understood. God is God and he is not.

*'See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?  
I lay my hand on my mouth. (Job 40:3-4)*

But the Lord kept going.

*Have you an arm like God,  
and can you thunder with a voice like his? (Job 40:9)*

*'Can you draw out Leviathan with a fish-hook,  
or press down its tongue with a cord? (Job 41:1)*

God's response to all of Job's questions is simply this: I am God. You are not. You are overstepping. Let me do my job.

We are thinking over these weeks about Virtues. The ancient Greeks spoke of Temperance, Courage, Wisdom, and Justice as the ideals toward which people should strive. These became known as the cardinal virtues or classic virtues. Christian theologians later added to the list Faith, Hope, and Love mentioned by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians. These were called the theological virtues. The list of seven deadly sins came about to illustrate the opposite of these seven virtues. But the list of virtues is much older.

Christian thinkers early on drew a distinction between the four Cardinal virtues and the three Theological Virtues. The first four are the result of human wisdom and effort. We can and should develop and perfect Temperance, Courage, Wisdom, and Justice within ourselves. Faith, Hope, and Love, on the other hand, are a work of God within us. God takes what is already in us and brings it to holy perfection. Faith is God's perfection of our intellect. Hope is God's perfection of our will. Love is God's perfection of all human abilities.

In Job we see the virtue of Faith at work. God entered the scene and perfected Job's intellect. God changed Job's understanding of the situation. Job had seen things from a limited, human point of view. God invited Job to see things from God's point of view.

I love this understanding of faith – the perfection of our intellect so that we see things from God's point of view. Frankly, too often, the church has deployed faith as weapon rather than offer it as a gift. People who ask honest intellectual questions are sometimes accused of not having enough faith. People who are sick are sometimes told they will be cured if they just have faith. Differences in belief become battlegrounds because some feel a need to defend the faith.

But the classic Christian understanding of faith is different. Faith is something God grows within us. It is something to receive and cherish, not grasp and defend.

And in a way Jesus gave the gift of faith to two grasping disciples. James and John asked to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus in glory. They had a sense that the end was near. Jesus had started explaining that the Son of Man would suffer and die and rise again. This revelation was like a whirlwind to the disciples. Like Job, James and John started making demands. They were scared and confused and wanted some sense of control.

So Jesus spoke from the whirlwind. Like God to Job, Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking.” He turned their attention to something bigger than themselves, something bigger even than this moment with him. “To sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

This little sentence is an illustration of faith. Even Jesus let go of controlling the outcome. “To sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant.” He was okay with that. And like God who pointed to the mysteries of creation beyond human comprehension, Jesus also pointed to divine purpose and intent at work. “It is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

This is what faith looks like. Jesus acknowledged that God was God. He let go of any need to control the outcome. And he trusted God’s purposes at work in the world.

So here we are today living in our own whirlwind. Winds of worry. Storms of sickness and suffering. Chaos of civic strife. The turbulence of broken relationships.

In the midst of the whirlwind, God gives us the gift of faith. Faith to remember that God is God and we are not. Faith to know this world has been and is held in God’s keeping so it is not ours to control. Faith to trust God is still working in this world despite the struggles of the moment.

Try to imagine the voice of God speaking in ways that give you this gift of faith. Maybe God sounds like your grandmother or a loving child or a helpful mentor or a wise sage. Keep that voice in mind as I read a poem by Teilhard de Chardin.

Chardin was a French philosopher and Jesuit priest. He also studied paleontology and took part in the discovery of a significant pre-human find. He dabbled in cosmology and wrote theories about how the universe is put together. And he wrote this poem, called Patient Trust, which is a good description of faith.

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—and that it may take a very long time. And so I think it is with you; your ideas mature gradually—let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don’t try to force them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the*

*benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.*

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<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/cardinal-virtues>

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/theological-virtues>

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, excerpted from *[Hearts on Fire](#)*

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Grace Burton-Edwards  
St. Thomas Episcopal Church  
Columbus, GA 31906  
StThomasColumbus.org