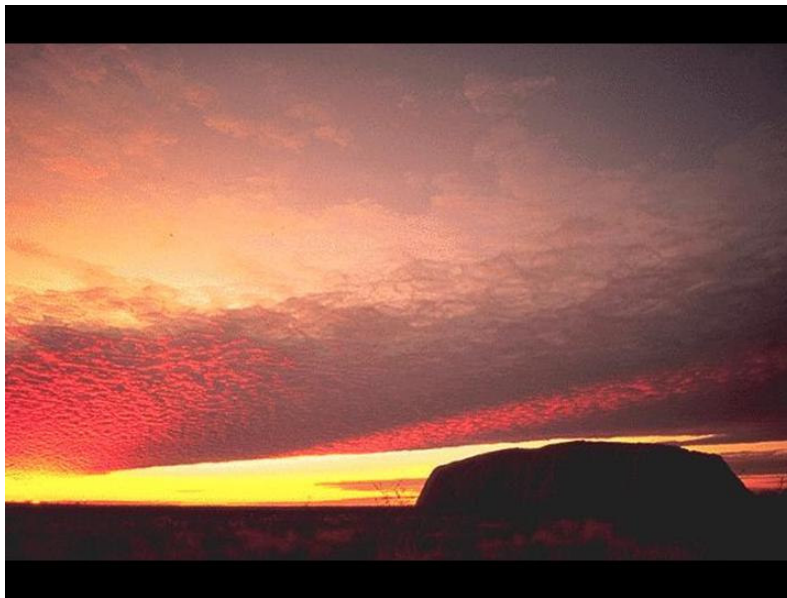


Bible Study – Session 3
Storm Sunday



LEARNING FROM STORMS

Earth Reading: Job 28.20-27

Beginning

In celebrating with creation, there is often a tendency to ignore nature in the raw, the storms, hurricanes and tornadoes that are also part of the weather system of our planet. Fierce winds are as much a part of our world as the air we breathe.

Throughout the Bible we not only meet storms of various kinds, but also occasions where God makes God's presence felt through a storm. Are storms simply expressions of God's power or something more? If we were to listen to all the elements of a storm or watch the ways of a storm, might we learn something about the very nature of creation and God's presence in creation.

Discuss: Have you been caught outside in the midst of a storm, a hurricane or a tornado? What was it like? What was your reaction? Intense excitement? Did you gain a new appreciation of nature or feel terrified?

Background

To appreciate the remarkable message of Job 28, we need to keep in mind two biblical traditions. The first tradition is the appearance of God in storms. Psalm 29 is a bold portrayal of the Lord as a storm God. Some scholars even suggest that this psalm was originally ascribed to the storm god Baal and later applied to the God of Israel.

In Psalm 29, the thunder of the storm is the voice of God. That voice is so powerful it causes ocean waters to rage, the mighty cedar trees of Lebanon to break and forests to be stripped bare. God's thundering voice also causes lightning to appear as flashes of consuming fire. God's voice can be a devastating power on Earth; in response the beings in the heavenly temple above respond with their own 'gloria'!

The second tradition we need to keep in mind is the wisdom thinking that we began to explore in the previous Bible studies for Ocean and Fauna Sundays. Job, you will recall, was urged to examine the natural world, both animate and inanimate domains, to discern in them the way of things, the inner code or wisdom that governs the nature and function of all parts of creation.

In Job 28 the world of storms and the world of wisdom meet in a most remarkable way.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read Job 28.1-22

The first part of Job 28 poses the age-old question: Where can wisdom be found? Human beings are experts at probing the depths of Earth to find precious stones and gold dust. Miners are willing to plunge deep into the darkness of Earth to find the valuable ore they seek. But can they find wisdom down below? (28.1-6)

Even natural creatures like hawks and falcons, who have amazing eyesight, or wild animals that have extraordinary instincts, cannot necessarily discern the presence of wisdom. (28.7-8) Wisdom is something deep, hidden, mysterious.

Wisdom is not something that can be found in the deeps of the sea, nor can it be bought with gold or silver. It is far more valuable and inaccessible than the most precious of jewels. (28.12-19)

Where then is wisdom found? What is its place or locus in the design of creation? It seems to elude humans and remain hidden from the eyes of eagles. The realm of death says it has heard a rumour of where wisdom is found, but no more. Wisdom remains the most elusive, deep and wondrous mystery of creation. (28.20-22)

Discuss: Without reading further in the chapter, what, in your opinion, is this wisdom that the poet is discussing? Where do you think it may be found? What would your answer be to the poet's question at this stage in the study?

Read Job 28.23-28

The Hebrew of verse 23 states that

God understands its way
And God knows its place.

In other words, God understands the way or nature of wisdom and its *locus*/place in order of creation. As we noted in earlier studies, the 'way' of something is its inner code or character. The mysterious way of wisdom is something God understands, even if humans struggle to do so.

The text then goes on to describe how God also knows the place of wisdom in the scheme of things. Like a good scientist, God undertakes a close observation of everything on Earth, everything beneath the skies above. He scrutinises and analyses the natural world in search of wisdom. (28.24)

The verses that follow may surprise us. God observes how four things were designed by God: the wind, the waters, the rain and the lightning. Together these four elements suggest a storm. God's observation, however, is not simply to note the presence of these elements. Rather, God analyses their design and construction. The wind is weighed, the volume of the waters determined, the rules for the rain established and the 'way' of lightning identified. (28.25-26)

In the very construction of the 'way' or design of each of these elements of the storm, God 'sees' wisdom, discovers its presence, uncovers its place. So the place of wisdom is not in one location. Wisdom is that inner dimension of all things that gives them their very nature, the underlying design of things, the hidden impulse that both governs and controls even the elements of a storm.

How does God respond when God discovers the presence of wisdom in the wondrous world God has created? After creating things in Genesis One, God responded with 'very good', or better perhaps, 'fantastic!'

In this account, God first sees or discovers wisdom. Then God announces its presence, telling the world where wisdom can be found. God's next step is to fix wisdom in its place, preserve it as the valuable sensor at the core of all creation things. Finally God goes back and starts exploring wisdom in creation once again. (28.27)

God is here portrayed as the model wise person, the scientist of old, who searches, discovers and then returns to re-search the very wonder that has been uncovered. And if humans wish to discover wisdom in the world, God's way of operating offers a genuine model to follow. The 'fear of the Lord' is ultimately following the way of God in the search to find wisdom as a governing impulse deep within this creation. (28.28)

Discuss: Where would you begin to search for wisdom in the natural world today? How would the model of God searching assist you? Can we also know this deep wisdom now that God has discovered it when creating? Will you look at storms differently as a result of this text?

CONSCIOUS OF THE CRISIS

Storms of various kinds have long been part of the natural order around the world. Human beings have learned to live with these storms as an integral part of the weather patterns of the planet. In the storm one can discern the way of the wind, the lightning and the rain for those who live on the sea shore or in the rain forest.

With the advent of global warming, the weather patterns are changing. This warming has not only caused the arctic circles to start melting and the water levels of the ocean to rise, thereby threatening many residences along the coast. The warming process has also increased the temperature of key channels and currents in the oceans of the world, currents that affect the weather pattern. The number and kind of storms across the globe are beginning to increase and threaten many habitats. Storms are on the increase.

Discuss: Where will we find the wisdom to ward off the disasters that have begun to invade our world because of global warming? Is there a way to understand the weather and pursue a model of global cooling? Yes, where can wisdom be found?

CONNECTING WITH CHRIST

Read Luke 8.22-25

The story of Jesus stilling the storm is well known to us. Jesus is fast asleep in the boat as they travel across a lake to the other side and apparently unaware of the conditions around the lake. A windstorm threatens to fill the boat with water, a crisis that the disciples who were fishermen would have experienced before.

This time they wake Jesus from his sleep and seem to panic rather than fall into their usual storm crisis mode. They cry out, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!'

Jesus wakes up, rebukes the storm and chides the disciples for their lack of faith!

It is traditional to read this story as an example of Jesus' miraculous power, his capacity not only to heal the sick, but also to intervene in the course of nature. Here he controls a storm that terrifies the disciples.

It is also possible to read this narrative in the light of the wisdom theme analysed above. Jesus is not so much exhibiting an extraordinary power play, but rather connecting with the wisdom in the storm, the inner impulse that governs the storm. Jesus, like God in Job 28, sees the wisdom in the storm and knows how to move that wisdom to produce calm. Jesus is in tune with nature and in tune with wisdom.

Discuss: Why is it important for us to recognise that Jesus not only connects with our inner beings, but also with the inner impulses of nature? Does this point ahead to the claim of Paul that Jesus is that power which reconciles nature to God as well as all humans?

CLOSING WITH PRAISE

Participants may wish to close by singing the following verse of Hymn 4 from *Habel Hymns Volume One*. The melody is Praise my Soul the King of Heaven.

SONG OF THE SEA

Watch once more the windswept storm clouds;
Suddenly the sky has wings!
God has come to rain among us,
Giving hope to all dry things.
Sing a song of splashing waters,
Pulsing through the veins of Earth.

PRAYER

*Jesus Christ, wisdom of God in human flesh,
help us to discern the presence of God in you
as you suffer on a cross and with creation
but also the wisdom of God in you and in all the forces
and parts of creation with which you are connected
as our cosmic Lord. Amen*