

**Sermon on Mark 10:35-45, Job 38:1-7, 34-41, and Hebrews 5:1-10**

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I have a new word which I love. It's a big word that was not introduced to me by my friend and colleague Charles Taylor. Charles loves to work big words into conversations to see if I'll have the wherewithall to ask him what in the world he's talking about. So, maybe this one will be a new one for Charles. The word was first brought to me several years ago by Brenda Roberts. It's a word her son Andrew taught to her. The word is "ginormous". It is an amalgamation of the words gigantic and enormous. It is a marvelously expressive word describing something that is colossally huge, bigger than life. I noticed recently that the word is being used in the mainstream these days so now I can use it legitimately.

We used to say that our God is awesome. But, that word has been so overused that it has lost its meaning. So, I think we should now say our God is ginormous. That is exactly what God is getting at with Job in our reading today. Job has been asking for answers from God, answers that would address Job's profound pain and suffering. He wants God to come clean with why Job should have to endure such misery, such anguish of mind, body, and soul.

God's response is not to directly answer Job, but to remind him that God is beyond all we can ever understand. God is greater than what our tiny minds can comprehend. Was Job there when the moon and the stars were set into orbit? Was Job there when the waters were set forth on the earth and then captured into boundaries? Who created the food for the powerful jaws and appetite of the lion? God's questioning of Job goes on and on for pages and pages. The point of it all? Don't forget Job...God is ginormous. God is beyond all you can ever dream of, imagine, or comprehend. You are only a teeny-tiny part of God's incredible big picture.

Hebrews, too, points to God's immensity. The writer tries to help us understand who Jesus is by describing an earthly high priest. The high priest is one who offers gifts and offerings to God and is gentle with those who have lost their way because the priest too has sinned. The priest is also one who does not boast in the position that he holds. We can understand all this. But then, the writer puts Jesus in the role of the *great* high priest, and once again, God, through Jesus, leaps beyond our understanding. Here is God, who became human, tempted but never sinning; one who was completely submissive to God; one who became eternal salvation for all. He was and is both human and beyond anything we can ever understand.

So, no wonder that after reading these passages, we can identify with James and John in our gospel reading. We, too, want to grab hold of some of that divine power. We want a part of that ginormousness. I can certainly see myself wanting to ask Jesus if I can sit with him on the throne of power. Well, maybe I wouldn't have asked, but I would have wanted to. I would have been one of the disciples who was mad at James and John because they asked for the honor before I got up the guts to open my mouth.

But, once again, Jesus confounds the disciples and us. "Can you drink from the same cup I drink and be baptized in the same baptism as I am?" "Well, yeah, Jesus. Of course we can." "You're right. You will. You will drink from the cup of suffering and be baptized into my baptism. But, my baptism is one of servanthood, not power. It is one of compassion, not thrones. It is one of generosity, not one of greed."

Jesus tells his disciples and us, that to continue to follow him, we will have to give up our notions of ginormous power in this world. Instead, we must jump out of the line in which we are jockeying for first place. We must put away our notions of thrones and riches and power. Instead, we must become servants.

And after Jesus tells us this again, he continues to live just what he says. Even though he, God's own son, should be first in line he stays the course of his life of love and servanthood.

He suffers and dies as a ransom for many. Does that mean God needed some sort of divine payment for all of our wrongs, our sins, our disobedience? I don't think so. Instead, Jesus' ransom, in Greek the word "lytron", means a liberation brought about by God.

Jesus' stays the course, suffers, and dies to show the world the way to freedom. True freedom isn't found in power, in sitting at the right and left of the king, but in serving others, even unto death. In Jesus, God frees us from slavery to power, from climbing the ladder while crushing others underneath. Jesus frees us from our own self-doubts that we aren't good enough, that we should be achieving more in the world, that we are only worthy if we are clinging to the top rungs of the ladder. Instead, Jesus calls us to serve one another, to be at peace as we love and care for each other and ourselves.

Let me try to make the point in another way, through a character from one of my favorite books and movies. Sam Gangee was as ordinary a hobbit as they come in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series. He loves where he lives in the shire and is content to be ordinary. All he wants to do is serve his friend and employer, Frodo. In the course of events that are not his fault, Frodo is tasked with taking the last ring of power to be destroyed. In so doing, he must keep it from the most evil of masters and from others who want the power of the ring for their own. The temptation to give into that power is almost too much for Frodo. The ring burdens him, almost to the point of destroying him. Yet, the whole time, Sam Gangee remains by Frodo's side. He helps him through countless horrors. He gives up food and drink at times so that Frodo may have more. He even offers to carry the ring for a time, not for the power, but because he sees how much it is eating his friend's soul alive. As their journey reaches its destination, Sam winds up carrying Frodo and the ring because he wants Frodo to succeed in his mission. With tears streaming down his face, he strains to carry his friend to the Mount of Doom. Never once does Sam ask for or accept thanks or praise.

He is constantly serving his friend. In the end, after they finally achieve their mission, the two hobbits return home to cheers and acclamations. Neither of the hobbits wants such.

But Sam, especially, doesn't want to be in the limelight. He only did what he did to serve his friend out of love and because somewhere, down deep, he understood that this is what the world of Middle Earth needed.

Jesus calls us to be the Sam Gangee's of the world, serving God through serving others with deep love. Sam underwent incredible suffering in mind, body, and spirit almost to the point of death. He also experienced incredible love, joy, and beauty. Along the way, he had his doubts that this was the right thing to do. But, he pressed on to serve his friend. It wasn't about Sam. It was about Sam's love and devotion. It was about something much bigger than Sam.

It isn't about us. It isn't about our climbing the ladder of success. It isn't about us earning accolades and praise. It isn't about who gets to sit at the right and left hand of power. It is about serving those at the very bottom of the ladder. It isn't easy and more often than not, it isn't pretty. But, it is freedom, given us by and through Jesus Christ, a ransom for many. It is freedom, given to us by God's grace to live abundantly now and forevermore, serving our ginormous, wonderful God. Amen.