

Redefining Greatness

Mark 10:35-45

Sunday, October 20, 2024

Rev. Dr. Chris Keating

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The Psalm begins with the psalmist's praise of God for the beauty and power of creation. "O Lord my God, you are very great! You are clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot; you ride on the wings of the wind; you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers."

Here the creature stands in awe and wonder of the creator, and dares to lean forward to listen for the messages sent by the winds.

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We've witnessed the unchanneled strength of creation's power in recent weeks. The classic one-two punch of Hurricanes Helene and Milton struck the Southeastern United States hard, leaving billions of dollars of damage, hundreds of persons dead, and thousands shaken by what they had experienced.

Power. Insurers may call this an act of God, but I'm not so sure. If, with the psalmist, we believe that the winds bring us messages of God, then I wonder about what message the increasing number and harsh brutality these storms hold for us.

The Psalmist speaks of God's power in restoring and renewing creation. Overwhelmed by the beauty of what is seen, the psalmist declares the vibrant beauty and startling diversity of creation. The psalm begins and ends with a call to praise God. Clint McCann, an esteemed scholar of the psalms and a good friend of this church has said that the psalmist is "honoring and facilitating God's purpose for the earth—life for all." The psalm reminds us of our calling to be stewards of God's power.

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This week I've paired Psalm 104 with the familiar story of James and John's sibling rivalry. Both scriptures call us to rethink the ways of greatness and power. The psalmist senses God's presence the way I saw beauty in this morning's fog. It evokes wonder and reminds us of how God is at work in our world. Let's borrow a line from Psalm 104's poetry and listen for the messages the wind carries for us in these texts.

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The easiest and most efficient way of measuring greatness, writes Dov Seidman is by asking "how much?" He writes that we ask, "How much money did I make, how much is our market share, how much is our stock worth?" Typically, this results in an understanding bigger is better when it comes to greatness. But Seidman says perhaps we should not define greatness as "how much" but rather as "how?" "How do we conduct ourselves in life and business? How do we sustain success? How do we work together? In the long term, he suggests, the idea of "how" we attain greatness is a far bigger idea than merely "how much?"

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