

**“Make Me a Channel”**  
**Mark 10:35-45; Hebrews 5:1-10; Job 38:1-7, 34-41**

**Job 38:1-7, 34-41**

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

<sup>4</sup>“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. <sup>5</sup>Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? <sup>6</sup>On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone <sup>7</sup>when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

<sup>34</sup>“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you? <sup>35</sup>Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we are?’ <sup>36</sup>Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind? <sup>37</sup>Who has the wisdom to number the clouds? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, <sup>38</sup>when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together?

<sup>39</sup>“Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, <sup>40</sup>when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert? <sup>41</sup>Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?

**Mark 10:35-45**

<sup>35</sup>James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” <sup>36</sup>And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” <sup>37</sup>And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” <sup>38</sup>But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” <sup>39</sup>They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; <sup>40</sup>but 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.”

<sup>41</sup>When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. <sup>42</sup>So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>43</sup>But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among

you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup>and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup>For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

### **Hebrews 5:1-10**

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. <sup>2</sup>He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; <sup>3</sup>and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. <sup>4</sup>And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

<sup>5</sup>So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you;” <sup>6</sup>as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”

<sup>7</sup>In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. <sup>8</sup>Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; <sup>9</sup>and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, <sup>10</sup>having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

### The Sermon

When you leaned back into the cool water on a hot day, for an instant, you felt almost weightless.

There at the Jordan River, you were surrounded by people like you—people from all over, from the city and from the countryside, who had heard that someone was out there offering a new way to go forward, and not by drawing an imaginary line behind you to pretend that your past had never happened, but by acknowledging that you hadn’t done everything the way you wish you had, and turning back to embrace the God who created you.

The whole region was electrified by John the Baptist, and they were going out and confessing their sin and being baptized.

And you were right there with them.

He had the magnetism of a celebrity up close, but he also had the smell of camel and locusts. But you trusted him as much as anyone in the world, and he held you carefully, as you lowered yourself under the surface.

What does your baptism mean to you?

On that hot day, the water was so cool and restorative, and the moment was so complete, you had just wanted to cry. Such unfathomable, unexpected relief.

At that moment, it was like you had spent your life throwing mud at yourself, or tramping through dirt and collecting it all up and down your legs, smudging it on your arms, soiling your face every time you raised a hand to wipe the sweat from your brow; and you'd worn that caked-on dirt for so many years, you almost forgot there was ever a clean person underneath.

And when you went under the surface, all that mud, all that garbage which had adhered to you mercilessly, just seemed to wash away in that cool water.

Now, you could start again. No longer would you be defined by your mistakes, or your embarrassments, or the worst moments and decisions of your life. Forget them. They hold no power over you any more.

Now, you knew you could make it through this life with confidence, having realized, hey, this stuff does wash off.

Now, you could look in the mirror and not be disgusted by what you saw there. You are not a catastrophe, you're not a disaster, and you're not a disease—no matter what catastrophes or disasters or diseases may have threatened to define you up until now.

Underwater, just for an instant, you held your breath. And as you did, for the first time, you thought about how grateful you really are for your breath.

Every time you inhale, air comes into the lungs, and an exchange begins to take place where oxygen is brought into your body's system while carbon dioxide is unloaded into the air. Your heart receives that oxygen and distributes it to all the other parts of your body.

Fortunately, we don't have to decide to make this happen every time. There's a center in your brainstem that sends a message to your breathing muscles telling them when to inhale and exhale. Receptors send signals and feedback to increase or decrease the output. It's "automatic, involuntary and continuous."<sup>i</sup>

And it happens throughout your life. The breathing in part is called "inspiration," and it's how we live.

And it's not the only miracle to consider when you give thanks for your life.

"Consider the fact," wrote Bill Bryson, "that for 3.8 billion years, a period of time older than the Earth's mountains and rivers and oceans, every one of your forebears on both sides has been attractive enough to find a mate, healthy enough to reproduce, and sufficiently blessed by fate and circumstances to live long enough to do so.

"Not one of your pertinent ancestors was squashed, devoured, drowned, starved, stranded, stuck fast, untimely wounded, or otherwise deflected from its life's quest of delivering a tiny charge of genetic material to the right partner at the right moment in order to perpetuate the only possible sequence of hereditary combinations that could result—eventually, astoundingly, and all too briefly—in you."<sup>ii</sup>

In that moment underwater, you found yourself part of something deep and vast and beautiful—something which you did not make and over which you have no control or authority.

You found a recognition that everything that exists, including you, belongs to God; and you realized that that is very good news.

You found awe, and humility, and gratitude.

What does your baptism mean to you?

The disciples were walking together toward Jerusalem, and Jesus was way up in front. James and John came trotting up and said, "Teacher, grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

And he said, "Are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" And they said, "We are able."

The other ten disciples weren't very happy with James and John over that.

It sounded like they were trying to skip over the whole merit part and just go straight for, "We want you to do that for us just because we asked first."

But pretty soon it became apparent to everyone that your own value, or the merit of your own acts, is not going to guarantee you a glorious spot, either.

He said to his faithful followers,

"The cup that I drink you *will* drink;  
and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you *will* be baptized;  
but to sit at my right hand or at my left isn't mine to grant,  
but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

Maybe for some of them that was the time they realized that humility is not the same thing as humiliation.

It's not embarrassing to recognize how small we really are  
and how inadequately we reflect the image in which we were made.

Instead, it's freeing to live in awe of the One who made us—  
to build your life and base your decision making around  
the recognition of God's awesomeness,  
and the yearning to become what we, God's children,  
were meant to be.

It's also harder to play the game of looking at all the people around you  
and deciding for yourself:  
do I hold this person in high regard, or low regard?

I was discussing the presidential primary debates, Republican and Democrat, with a church member last week, and we both agreed: listening to them all, you'd think they live in two different universes.

And depending on which party a candidate is in, he or she will speak of someone with either high regard, or low regard.

A person who is disreputable to one will be seen as heroic by another. He or she will be held in high regard by some, low regard by others.

High regard, or low regard?

Some of you will remember the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square a quarter of a century ago. Chinese students and citizens had occupied the symbolic heart of Beijing to protest the lack of transparency from their government.

It was not too long before troops and tanks were sent in to restore order.

And you may remember the image of that guy, who looked like he was carrying groceries or a gym bag or something, who went and stood in front of one of the tanks, blocking its progress.

His identity remains a mystery; there have been some theories over the years and a few contradictory reports of what became of him. Most of the world regards him as heroic; most of China's 1.3 billion people don't know of him due to official censorship.

But to those who have seen the footage, he is generally held in high regard.

I wish I knew the name of the commentator who so significantly jarred my thinking several years ago by saying he thought there was another hero in Tiananmen Square that day: the driver of the tank.

Sent in by a repressive regime to restore order, his brief was probably to go in and crush the resistance. Why else do you send tanks in to greet unarmed students?

But he or she wouldn't do it. You can see in the footage the tank almost pathetically tries to steer around the guy. So the guy takes a couple of steps over and the tank acts like, "Well now look what you did; I can't go that way either."

Salute the unarmed man who stood in front of a column of tanks to demand that people be treated like people.<sup>iii</sup> But perhaps we should not be too quick to judge those who are in different positions, who have power, authority, and orders to kill, and refuse to do it.

High regard, or low regard? Tough call.

Fortunately, those who embrace humility know they do not have to make that call.

Judge someone's actions by their faithfulness, their kindness, their generosity their goodness. But a Christian with humility knows that only God can judge people.

Miller Williams wrote:

“Have compassion for everyone you meet, even if they don't want it. What seems conceit, bad manners, or cynicism is always a sign of things no ears have heard, no eyes have seen.

“You do not know what wars are going on down there where the spirit meets the bone.”<sup>iv</sup>

High regard, or low regard?

I heard, many years ago, of a woman in Europe—middle aged and a Christian minister by the time I heard this story—who remembered being interrogated by the Gestapo when she was a little girl. And when I say interrogated, I mean she was being tortured, having to do with her fingernails. She remembered being in a chair, and they were doing some painful thing to her little hands, and finally one of the officers in the room shouted out, “For God's sake! Thus is a six year old girl!”

All those decades later, she still felt a warmth when she remembered that moment in the midst of hell. Did she hold that gestapo officer in high regard? Or low regard?

Or is it not so easy to categorize a human being?

What about you? High regard, or low regard? What do you think about you?

There are mistakes we make, sometimes catastrophic;  
there are physical and even moral vulnerabilities that we try to overcome—or not;  
there are times we disappoint ourselves,  
and difficult circumstances we find ourselves up against.  
We have moments of great nobility,  
and episodes of astonishing smallness.

Maybe a mature Christian humility stands before God like Job, in awe,  
and recognizes that, in a world with suffering and injustice and vexing mysteries,  
it's not about trying to figure out and explain who God is  
in relation to the world as we see it.

It's about understanding who *we* are  
in relation to our awesome, loving, uncontainable God.

Maybe a fully developed Christian humility recognizes that,  
just as Jesus came not to be served but to serve,  
our highest honor and most joyful calling  
is to give all that we can give, and do, and be,  
to building up broken people in this broken world.

Maybe a true humility hears the writer of the letter to Hebrews,  
who recognizes, with the most profound awe,  
that even the Son of God was made complete not by human achievement—  
not even by his own—but by God's will.

It is so good to be baptized into a life wherein  
*God* is judge; *God* is sovereign; *God* is God;  
and you and I are not.

Stewardship is about trusting God enough  
to live lives of integrity and take risks for the kingdom.

And it's about embracing awe in grateful humility.

We don't have forever to do the things we are capable of doing for the world.  
And we can't wait forever to say what needs to be said to the people we love.

It is time to embrace our baptism and become who we were made to be.

*Lord, make me a channel of your peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,  
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love;*

*for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.<sup>v</sup>*

What does your baptism mean to you?

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<sup>i</sup> Sarah Novotny and Len Kravitz, Ph.D., “The Science of Breathing.”

<http://www.unm.edu/~lkravitz/Article%20folder/Breathing.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Bill Bryson, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. New York: Broadway Books, 2004.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/tiananmen-square-what-happened-to-tank-man-9483398.html>

<sup>iv</sup> From Miller Williams, *Some Jazz A While*.

<sup>v</sup> Popularly known as the Prayer of St. Francis, this prayer originated in the 1920s, seven centuries after Francis of Assisi.