



This month in worship we’ve been responding to questions of faith posed by the children of our church. Today is another good one: “Who made God?”

If you are someone who likes concrete answers, I’ve got good news. The Bible actually answers this question directly and succinctly...even if the answer might not be satisfying.

In his letter to the Colossians, chapter 1 verse 17 the Apostle Paul says: “He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” The gospel of John, which the choir will sing part of in a few minutes, answers the question in a similar way. All of which is to say that, according to the Bible, no one or nothing “made” God because God simply is – and was – and ever will be.

Last week’s sermon was a little longer than normal, so maybe my best bet would be to wrap this week’s sermon up right now and sit down since we’ve already answered the question.

Of course, since preachers have a hard time being quiet you know I can’t actually do that. Instead, I think it might be interesting to think about why it is good news that the God we worship (and the God who loves us) is “sovereign” – which is to say, too big for even our best human thinking to understand.

Before we hear this morning’s Scripture, let us pause to pray, and then be centered by the choir.

In spite of our best efforts, O God, you outpace the limits of our mind. And yet, in spite of those limits, we understand in an intimate way that you claim us, and save us, and love us – because we have seen that love on a cross and through an empty tomb. So, now, as we approach your word – we ask that your Holy Spirit may settle on our hearts and minds so that we can appreciate the perspective that comes from comparing our thoughts to your thoughts. We ask in Jesus’s name. Amen.

Our Scripture today comes from the book of Job. You may remember that the book of Job tells a story about a wager that Satan made with God to test the limits of Job’s faithfulness. I

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will let either one of the preachers named Lucy deal with the problems and questions that brings up on another Sunday; those won’t be my focus this morning.

What I am going to read takes place at the very end of the story. Job has been tested – and, finally...after enduring a lot...Job breaks and questions God’s goodness and mercy. In spite of what your bulletin says, I am going to read various verses from chapter 38 – which is the first time God speaks to Job, and then Job’s response to God in chapter 42. Listen with me for the word of the Lord:

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

‘Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone
when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?
‘Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
so that a flood of waters may cover you?
Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go
and say to you, “Here we are”?
Who has put wisdom in the inward parts,
or given understanding to the mind?

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Then Job answered the Lord:

‘I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
“Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?”
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
“Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you declare to me.”
I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.’

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For the record, I don’t think the person who asked this morning’s question should despise themselves and repent in dust and ashes.

I also don’t think that Job meant that in as severe a way as it may sound to our ears. What I think Job meant is that he understood his place – “from dust we have come and to dust we will return.”

Some people think the story of Job is a cautionary tale about asking God too many questions. I don’t agree with those people.



I think it’s a good thing to ask God questions. I think it’s perfectly fine to shake our fist at the heavens sometimes when we are upset or angry about life or the world not being fair. God created us to be in relationship – and when you are in relationship with someone that’s part of the deal: you push, you question, you express concern, anger, sadness, joy.

It’s not a sin to ask God questions or express emotions – and, as I read it, that’s not why God felt the need to put Job in his place.

I think God put Job in his place because Job assumed too much; I think it was because Job was arrogant. Job thought he knew better than God – more than God – about the nature of goodness and mercy and grace. That is why God’s voice thundered from out of the whirlwind.

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To me, the question, “who made God?” doesn’t smack of arrogance...just of natural curiosity. I love the question!

And what the question reveals, I think, is that it is natural and normal and comfortable for us to want to think about God in human categories and terms. We know that all living things were created – so it stands to reason that God would be, too.

We personify God so that God becomes easier for us to understand. We love that Jesus called God Abba (or father). We love the parable of the “Prodigal Son” because of the picture we



hold in our minds of the father welcoming his wayward child home in an embrace – which is the kind of embrace we hope to receive from God when we arrive at our ultimate home. God is the potter, we are clay. We like to think about God walking in the Garden of Eden at the first evening breeze.

There are times the Bible gives us handles – and human categories – to help us wrap our minds around God. And there are times the Bible doesn’t. When God appeared to Moses in the fire of the bush and Moses asked for God’s name – God said “I am who I am.” That’s not exactly a version of God who gives us warm fuzzies. In other parts of Scripture God shows up in a fiery pillar. In a still, small voice. As a bright cloud at the Mount of Transfiguration. In bizarre visions in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

Even though God chose to relate to us in the most amazing and intimate way – through a babe born in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes – we can’t forget that God ***is also*** wholly other; too big; too marvelous; too complex; too powerful for us to comprehend.

And yet – we try, don’t we?

Maybe we don’t mean it to be arrogant – we are just trying to learn. Studying and thinking about God is a worthy and life-giving pursuit. But we try.

It’s not a problem to think about God. It’s not a problem to study. It’s not a problem to plumb the depths of theological truth.

The problem comes when we think we’ve figured God out.

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The problem comes when the things we believe about God – and especially the things we assume about God and God’s decisions and God’s choices and God’s preferences – become things about which we are certain.

And if, as human beings, we claim to be certain about who God is and what God does and what God thinks...well, that’s when we might have gotten a little too big for our britches and need to be put back in our place.

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I’m pretty sure I have shared this story before (I’ve been here long enough that I am repeating myself...what can I say...it happens), but my former theology professor shared an experience that taught me something about the inclination of human beings to think we’ve got God figured out.

My professor’s name was Shirley. This was well before we started clarifying our pronouns, but Shirley was a man.

Shirley was a professor of Reformed theology – he studied under Karl Barth in Basel, Switzerland – someone who was a giant in the field. Early in his tenure as a professor at Columbia Seminary – maybe in the 1960s or early 70s – Shirley was accused by a Presbytery in south Georgia of being a heretic. The charge was that Shirley was a universalist – someone who believed that God saved all people – regardless of their behavior, beliefs, or backgrounds. It was decided that the best course of action was for Shirley to show up before a panel of members of that Presbytery to be questioned about his teachings and beliefs.



When the time came for him to be interviewed, Shirley showed up – coat and tie – to sit face-to-face across from a panel of men who had accused him. The questions started – and drug on and on – until, finally, the chair of the committee got to the main point.

“Dr. Guthrie – I think what we really want to know is whether or not you believe that all people will go to heaven.”

Shirley thought for a moment, shifted in his seat, and then said, “No, Mr. Chairman, I do not think that all people will go heaven. In fact, I think that when some people get to heaven and see who God has let in they just won’t want to stay.”

Shirley told my class that story on a day that we talked about the implications of believing in the sovereignty of God. It turns out, Shirley’s teacher – Karl Barth – was once accused of being a universalist, too. Rather than antagonize a group of southern gentlemen from Georgia, what Dr. Barth did was make a theological argument.

In order to be a universalist, one has to assume they know the decisions that God will make.

In fact, believing that God is sovereign means that we cannot claim to be certain about what decisions God will make – because, as human beings, there is always going to be a limit to what we understand about God. Therefore, when it comes to matters of salvation (and everything else), we as human beings need to hold our beliefs...even our passionate convictions...with a measure of humility. Because none of us have the capacity to claim that we are certain when it comes to who God is and what God chooses to do.

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Another one of my teachers – only through his books and sermons, never in the classroom – told a story once about advice that his father gave him when he was a little boy.

Fred Craddock grew up in a small, rural town in Tennessee. On those lazy evenings in the summer when the stars are slow to appear, Fred would lay on his back in a field by his house and stare up into the sky thinking deep thoughts and pondering life and faith. This is how Fred describes the exchange:

[One evening my father lay down beside me] and he said “Son, how far can you think?”

I said, “what?” He said, “How far can you think?” “Well, I just don’t know what you mean.” “Just think as far as you can think up toward the stars.”

I screwed my imagination down, and I said, “I’m thinking...I’m thinking...I’m thinking.” He said, “Think as far as you can think.” “I’m thinking as far as I can think.”

He said, “Well, drive a stake out there now. In your mind, drive down a stake. Have you driven down the stake? That’s how far you can think.” I said, “Yes, sir.”

He said, “Now what’s on the other side of your stake?”

I said, “Well, there’s more sky.”



He said, “Move your stake.”

And we spent the evening moving my stake out there. It was a crazy thing to do, but I will never thank him enough for doing it.¹

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There is a lot about God that we do not – and cannot – know. The same is true for the ways God is active in our lives and in our world.

In spite of our desire to nail down our beliefs into secure certainties, there’s always something on the other side that we have yet to discover...there’s always a need to move our stake.

I get how that can feel overwhelming.

I get how that can make us feel out of control.

When we really stop and consider just how vast God is...God’s being, God’s truth, God’s plan – and how small and limited we are – it can be frightening.

But here is another way to frame it.

Those places in our own lives that feel stuck.

¹ Craddock, Fred, Craddock Stories, pp. 123-124



Those relationships we have that feel strained.

Those problems in our world that feel intractable.

Those systemic sins that seem like they are forever baked into culture.

God is bigger than those, too.

Much bigger.

This sermon started with a question about who made God.

Here's the answer once more:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing has come into being. What has come into being with him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Not then. Not now. Not ever.

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In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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