

DIVINE INFRASTRUCTURE

Pentecost 19, Year B – Job 1: 1; 2:1-10; Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Every time I drive to or from Toronto or the Greater Toronto Area, the so-called GTA, I confront the inadequacy of our highway infrastructure in this most densely-populated area of Canada. Apparently, the stretch of Highway 401 between Kitchener and Toronto is the busiest highway in the world – and as anyone who has spent hours creeping along the roadway in stop-and-go, bumper-to-bumper traffic can attest, there are too many vehicles trying to make the trip most hours of most days.

I've noticed that if you are running for public office these days, a promise to improve "our infrastructure" catches peoples' attention, almost as quickly as promising to lower taxes. The politician who could do both at the same time, though, has yet to emerge.

Now the example of an extraordinary volume of traffic on a medium volume highway may not be the best example of an absence of infrastructure, but it is an available and familiar image to most of us. My guess is that the shift from trains to transport trucks as the preferred method in how we transport freight moved more quickly in North America than anyone expected, and vehicular traffic increased exponentially in a relatively short period of time, thereby clogging our busiest roads. It takes a lot of time and a even more money to build new roads or widen old ones, and for even the most responsive government, it's difficult to keep up with the ever-increasing demand. Also, the affluence in this part of Canada translates into more people owning more vehicles. Place into the mix the occasional government that ignores the need to keep improving roads and highways, and extreme traffic congestion becomes the norm.

After church this morning, I'm driving to Toronto for a meeting. It could be that imagining that trip has influenced my choice of sermon illustration today.

Infrastructure, though, in a general sense, is something about which people have become increasingly aware in this so-called computer age. Computers have influenced the way we think and see the world. To operate a computer, we intuitively learn about systems and how they relate or talk to one another. And we become aware of how important cooperation among systems is in the world beyond computers. More and more, everything, it seems, relies on infrastructure – systems relying on other systems in order to work.

I thought of the metaphor of infrastructure when I revisited the prologue to the Book of Job this week and then thought about the worldview advanced by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, the citations in our First and Second Lessons, this morning.

We don't really have the opportunity this morning to delve into the Book of Job, but the idea of the book is that Satan tests Job with extreme suffering and loss to see if his faith in God can be shaken. It's a fairly harrowing contest for Job: he resists suggestions from within and without either to give up on God or disbelieve that he has led a righteous life. His friends tell him that he must have done something wrong to have earned all his misfortune. He is fairly impressive, though, in resisting the temptation offered by his wife in the prologue to "curse God and die."

Late in the book, Job starts to question God. And for once, God's answer, even though it takes the form of rhetorical question after rhetorical question, is definitive – so much so, that Job is left asking himself, "What was I thinking? Of course, God is above reproach, all my suffering notwithstanding. God is God, and this season of extreme suffering and loss is not the last word." In the epilogue to the Book of Job, we see that Job's life, health, family and property have been restored – many times over. It is a story that challenges those who would limit the grace of God in our lives.

In the Hebrews reading, the author attempts to show his or her readers a theological blueprint that lays out God's plan of salvation. This past summer, we saw an actual blueprint of God's salvation called the *Mappa Mundi*, the map of the world. Jessie actually gave me a book on maps when Elizabeth was baptized back in May, and when I read in author Simon Garfield's book *On the Map* about this medieval map describing the world through the eyes of faith in a gracious and loving God, I could hardly believe it when Garfield said that it was housed in Hereford Cathedral, the home of the Three Choirs Festival, this past summer. Paula and I already had our tickets to go to Hereford for concerts, services, and organ recitals, but by coincidence we could see this fantastical map or blueprint, if you will, of how God brought

salvation first to Jerusalem and the Mideast, but then to Europe, mostly France, and finally to England. The Old Testament stories were represented, but so was Jesus.

What we have in this morning's reading from Hebrews is the narrative for another *Mappa Mundi*. Jesus, the author tells us, translates God into human form, but then as a human accomplishes the seemingly impossible by suffering a salutary death. What a concept! Jesus, the Son of God, somehow embraces all of humanity's sin and suffering, and in the embrace, sanctifies us, frees us from all that gloom and doom, and calls us brothers and sisters – not a bad text for a baptismal Sunday.

And so, what we have in the proclamation of these two readings, the prologue of Job and the verses from Hebrews, chapters 1 and 2, is a description of infrastructure that does not fail. We may suffer terribly, we may have unbelievable losses, we may be miserable sinners, but above and beyond us, within and among us, beneath and around us is God's steadfast love which raises us up over and over again through all our days. Divine infrastructure for the children of God. Death and resurrection, loss and restoration: God's powerful love, God's steadfast love – for you and for me, for us as a congregation stepping into an unknown future, for all those people we remember in prayer, for the whole people of God – grace, mercy, forgiveness, restoration, second chances.

God loves us, Jesus shows us in his death and resurrection. There's power there *especially* when we're sure we're toast. Divine infrastructure. "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son."