

Palisades Presbyterian Church

***Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time***

October 29, 2006

On Reflection:

There is a placard posted on the front of the building in which Ruby Son-Mae (Nguyen Thi Son) lived in for 1204 days. In large letters it read: "Tình Thuong, Luong Tâm, Trách Nhiệm" - "Loving Compassion, Conscience, Responsibility"

Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of [humanity].  
- Rabindranath Tagore, Bengali poet.

Readings: Job 42: 1-6, 10-17

The Gospel of Mark: 10: 46-52

Hymns: #315 Every Time I Feel the Spirit

#319 Spirit

#339 Be Thou My Vision

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Grace and Resistance

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Continuous Creation...in his book God is a Verb, Rabbi David Cooper writes about *Continuous Creation*. In it he says this...

"the principle of continuous creation, without beginning or end, is based upon the idea that there is a source of life that eternally emanates the energy required for all existence. If this source were to withhold itself for but a split second, everything would vanish. [Poof! – my words!] That is to say, all humanity, all nature, all creation is constantly being sustained each and every moment. It is as if creation were a light bulb that stays illuminated as long as its electricity is flowing. The instant we shut off the power, the light fades out."

Sustaining energy, force of life, beckons wonder and, quite naturally, resistance.

In electricity, resistance is a word used to describe the level to which an object opposed the flow of electricity. It is measured in different ways, often using a formula some of us remember, some like me more vaguely than others, as  $R = \text{voltage}/\text{current}$  passing through the object. Think of what would happen if you held the opposite end of a rubber ball or the opposite end of a metal knife to which electricity is applied. One object has greater resistance the other has much less resistance and much greater conductivity. I'll bet you know which is which!

In the realm of electricity and energy, resistance is an important characteristic in making sure things run properly. Unlimited, unbridled energy at full force would

blow out every electrical device that I know of. So “stepping down or up” the energy, almost as if flowing through a series of locks to raise and lower seafaring vessels from one level of a body of water to the next – this control of electricity through resistance is directly tied to the effective use of energy in our electrical grids and applications and the force of power that is available to the end user.

Some “end users” of the force seem to have a greater capacity than others. In the film series Star Wars, resistance to the force was controlled by a low level of midichlorians, while those with whom the force was strong had a higher level of these microscopic organisms in their bodies. Here’s how Wikipedia.com describes the midichlorians:

...organisms in the fictional *Star Wars* universe, first mentioned in the prequel trilogy. They are microscopic life-forms that reside within the cells of almost all living things and communicate with the Force. Midi-chlorians comprise a collective consciousness and intelligence, forming links between everything living and the Force. They are symbionts with all other living things; that is, without them, life could not exist. The Jedi have learned how to listen to and coordinate the midi-chlorians. If they quiet their minds, they can hear the midi-chlorians speaking to them, telling them the will of the Force. In order to be a Jedi or a Sith, [sort of the anti-Jedi] one must have a high concentration of midi-chlorians in one's cells. This idea is somewhat similar to 17th-century philosopher Gottfried Leibniz's theory of monads—infinitesimal elementary particles that exist as something of an amalgam of matter and consciousness (termed "apperception").

You really can't make this stuff up. Somewhere, these physical properties such as those of electricity and the fantasy of a space epoch from a long time ago in a galaxy far far away... come out of somewhere. One out of the physical nature of our universe or part of it and the other out of the imaginative reflection of internal processes of being. And there are stories and examples that are about, within, and beyond these arbitrary boundaries of physical and conscious limitations – all of them framed to some degree or the other by resistance, whether intentional or otherwise.

I know about resistance. I resist doing laundry with a passion.

Kidding aside, though, for years I resisted the call to ministry, not directly or even intentionally, but I had been molded and shaped in such a way that the call I felt or heard or knew inside was “stepped down” by the louder voices and obstacles placed in my path. Until I joined in community with others who had learned how to silence the voices of others and overcome the obstacles of dominating groups, not until then was it possible for the amplification of the small voice I had known calling me – to become clear enough in an indescribable way for me to trust it and follow.

I guess a Star Wars fan might say that I had somehow increased my level of midichlorians!

And, I don't think I am alone. I think we all have had these sorts of things happening in our own lives in many ways, where we finally break free from the control of others or institutions in some way, overcoming the resistance in ourselves or of others – moving ahead, doing something – better: being someone in a way that lets the energy and the force flow.

Low resistance and high energy!

I mentioned last week, in an oblique sort of way that the story of Job is of uncertain origin. Some date it in one version of another as far back as early Sumerians (28<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> C. B.C.E), others place it during the time of the patriarchs, around the 19<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. It is included in the section of the First or Old Testament that is known as the Wisdom Literature. Its purpose is to teach, to lay out consequences for actions, and to offer people information on how to live in a way that is faithful and knowing of God. Perhaps, like me, you share some discomfort with the more literal translations or interpretations of this Book of Job that truly portrays God as a Creator who would accept challenges from Satan, testing a human being through a series of trials and tragedies to win a bet, so to speak. Not the God I know. Probably not the God Ruby will come to know.

However, looking at it as a book that reveals God as the power that sustains life in all its forms; God who is beyond our understanding or control, yet ultimately a just and loving God...that connection I can make. It is also not such a great leap for me to see some of these early stories as mythic, something like the narratives popular in our days that carry with them morals, uplifting themes, and that bring us back to the greater mystery, in a variety of ways with a variety of names.

It may be that the early writers who fixed the story of Job in its current form were writing more about the grace of God, than about the wrath of God or God's seemingly cursory relationship with humankind.

Once Job related himself rightly with God, God's grace flowed freely, but this time for reasons in direct opposition to Job's original understanding of why he was blessed before the trials.

Before the trials that befell him, Job saw himself as blessed because he was righteous. In effect, he had orchestrated his good fortune based on his own behavior. The interruption in his life created a setting for the clear statement about whom it was that was in charge of the universe, and once that was established -- God's grace restored Job – because Job, though all his arguing, never lost faith. Paul says it later in Ephesians 2:8 -"For by grace are ye saved

through faith," explained Paul, "and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God..." (Eph. 2: 8)

The resistance, then, is in a way related to our measure of faith. For me, it is not so much that I have a certain amount of faith – more or less; but what it is that fills up the space allotted for my faith – however much it is that I might have – so that when faith becomes overwhelmed by my designs or worry – fear fills the void. It's the gravitational pull of negative space – in this case most attractive to being afraid. In those places, I attempt to increase control.

Teacher story?

Ultimately, it is a resistance to losing what I have or not getting what I want – that resistance blocks the energy, the grace – and for a while I share Job's trials. Sooner or later, though, metaphorically, I end up in a situation face-to-face with God, so to speak, I throw up my hands, shake my head a bit, and smile – and say, OK. And, eventually, it all works out.

I think this is what Jesus is trying to tell his disciples, again, in this morning's reading in Mark. Here is Bartimaeus, sitting roadside, non-sighted, hearing that Jesus is near he calls out to him. Enter the resisters: "Quiet, Bartimaeus, quiet!" for they addressed him sternly. But Bartimaeus resisted the resisters, he would not be quieted. He called out more loudly, and Jesus had him brought to him. And when Bartimaeus asked for his sight, Jesus restored it, saying, "Go; your faith has made you well."

He might have added: You believed, even when some tried to push you away. Your resistance to those that resisted you – freed you. Bartimaeus, the kindness and grace of God is upon you.

In preparing this morning's comments I discovered some interesting things. Remember those midichlorians of Star War's fame, well it seems that Anakin Skywalker, father of Luke and Princess Leia, and who later became Darth Vader – well, his midichlorians were in the 27,000 range, compared to Yoda's 14,500. In the saga, it was clear that some were given certain gifts and the power to do certain things others were unable to do.

Yet the force was never limited, just their abilities to communicate with the Force. And so it is I think of grace, it is never limited to us and even when we have a higher level of resistance to it, it eventually wins out for it emanates from God's loving-kindness that is given to all God's creation. In the eternity of all things, God's love and grace are ultimately irresistible.

So, on this day, this day when we welcome Ruby Son-Mae into the baptism we share, it is good to remember, I think, that God's grace is always with us. Creation and grace are continuous in this very moment – NOW! and, in every

moment of every day of our lives. We can neither demand nor reject it and resistance, well, is futile. So, know that you – we – all of us are loved and embraced in the soft and cottony world of God's grace and goodness – even when we feel otherwise.

This is Good News, indeed.

Amen.