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How many times have you wished you could get someone to do whatever you want? Maybe it's something at home you want done: things picked up around the house, getting items done on the honey-do list, getting the kids to pick up their toys. Or maybe it's something bigger—like getting the doctor to solve a serious health problem. Or even bigger—getting the political candidates to work together rather than putting negatives ads on TV. Or even bigger—getting nations to stop fighting with one another.

Although these ideas may be good things, we often don't get to tell others what we want done, but it appears that two of Jesus' disciples tried to tell Jesus what they wanted done. I wonder what motivated James and John to ask him a favor. Of all the things they could have asked for, they wanted to know if they could sit at his left and right hands when he came to power. Maybe since Jesus and his disciples were on the road to Jerusalem, James and John had in mind that when Jesus entered Jerusalem he would become the new leader, and they didn't

want to get left out of the new power structure they thought he might establish.

I can just imagine the discussion the two disciples had together, scheming how to get on the inside track ahead of the others:

“Let's get in line for the best seats before the other disciples claim them.”

“Yeah. Remember that discussion the twelve of us all had the other day about who is the greatest?”¹

“When Jesus heard us arguing about the idea, he sure shut down that conversation...but I would still like to know who he thinks is the best among us. Who will he select as his right-hand man?”

“His response to us was a bit ambiguous—something about the first will be last and that we should all become like children.”

“It didn't make much sense to me either. So if he becomes the king when we enter Jerusalem, maybe we should ask him now to be seated at his right and left hands before the other disciples think of the idea.”

“Good idea. Let's ask when the others aren't around.”

It's so tempting, isn't it, to try and get the best seat for ourselves—especially if we think the number of seats is limited, as one man experienced while waiting for his airline flight.

On one particular day, bad weather had caused delays and cancellations throughout the system. Hundreds of anxious travelers were on standby. One of these passengers, a senior business executive, was desperate to get on a plane so he wouldn't be late for a meeting. He kept crowding the counter, trying to get the airline staff to do something to move his name higher up the standby list.

The agent had just put down the microphone, having said to the crowd for the third or fourth time: "Those of you who are on standby, please sit down and we will call your name when we have a seat for you."

But this was a man who would not take "maybe" for an answer. He kept pestering the agent, explaining how important it was that he get on the next flight. Finally, in exasperation, he asked her, "Do you know who I am?"

The agent had had enough. Picking up the microphone, she announced: "Ladies and gentlemen, we have a man here who does not know who he is. Would someone please claim him, offer him a seat in the waiting area, and tell him I'll talk to him when it's his turn?"²

It seems as though this man had gotten lost—he no longer knew who he was, for he seemed to think he was more important than anyone else. This traveler got caught up in the whirlwind of self-importance.

There are so many ways to get lost in life—so many whirlwinds that can blow into our lives and create chaos. The whirlwind of a struggling economy can blow those whose life had been doing ok into the turmoil of unpaid bills. The whirlwind of cancer can send former healthy lives into a series of long treatments and declining strength. Seniors who experience a caregiver taking advantage of them by stealing money can enter a whirlwind of confusion.

No age is protected from these sudden whirlwinds that can enter our lives. I see, for example, even students in my college classes who

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suddenly face an unexpected crisis. They fall behind in assignments. And soon the whirlwind may even propel some to drop a class.

This week someone sent to me via Twitter a link to a story about a college student at Portland Community College who came out of class and found his bike stolen. Someone had cut the lock, and the student had no other way to get back home. His life was suddenly thrown into a whirlwind of chaos. He went to the campus police and gave them a description of the bike, which eventually led to its recovery.

Upon recovering the bike, however, the police discovered a note that had been attached, giving us a glimpse of the whirlwind going on in the thief's life:

I have been laid off for two years and struggling with addiction off and on. I have been praying that someone would stop me and the Portland police finally did. I am grateful because I have been sick, literally, every day for months because I don't like who I am when I'm doing this. Included with my apology is \$10 from my

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Rev. Dr. Douglas Cripe

pocket to cover the cost of your cable. I am more than sorry for taking your bike and I hope you will forgive me and maybe pray for me.³

Although the one who had taken this bike was in a whirlwind, he cried out for help, hoping that someone could help him find his way out of the confusion he was experiencing. He seems to be a good person who had gotten lost along the way.

His letter almost sounds like Job's cry for help, for Job had lived a good life, tried to do what was right, and yet, he found his life in chaos. He cried out to God, "If I have done something wrong, please tell me what it was." Job's friends tried to blame Job for his problems, but Job knew that he had done nothing to create such a whirlwind of problems.

While searching for answers, Job heard God answer out of the whirlwind, and at first the response seemed a bit odd. God asked Job where he was when God created the foundations of the earth, from the waters of the sea to clouds of the earth to even the stars of the sky, and then God asked a series of such questions as:

Job 38:1-7; Mark 10:35-45
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“Have you walked along the bottom of the ocean?”

“Can you loosen the belt of stars that form the constellation Orion?”

“Can you send forth lightning?”

“Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?”

Job replied, “I am so small in comparison to such things, so how can I answer you?”

At first it may seem that God was uncaring in this reply to Job, but I think Job sensed something deeper in God’s response. In the midst of all the wonder and the vastness of the universe, we humans are very small and seemingly insignificant. And yet, God is present with us in whatever whirlwind we may encounter in life. No matter how

difficult a struggle we encounter, God is right there in the midst of it. Sometimes we don’t see the bigger picture since we get so caught up in the details of our lives, but somehow in the vastness of the complexity of the universe, God still senses the chaos in each of our lives. Job discovered he was not alone, and in this ancient drama, we still hear some good news of hope for us today.

We don’t have to be the most important—or even setting at the right or left hand of Jesus—for God to notice us. When the winds begin blowing and your life begins to swirl in confusion, hold on tight. Don’t let go. And even if you feel as though you are losing your grip, remember—God never lets go of you.

¹ Mark 9:33-37

² *Homiletics*, September-October, 2012, 65.

³ Eliza Murphy, “Bike Thief Leaves Handwritten Apology Note, Plus \$10 for New Lock,” Oct. 12, 2012, <http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/abc-blogs/bike-thief-leaves-handwritten-apology-note-plus-10-221835712--abc-news-topstories.html>