

“The Majesty of God Is Among You All”

1. I wonder if you’ve ever tried to work the puzzle called “Sudoku”
  - a. An early version of the puzzle dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> century France, but the version which is called Sudoku became a worldwide phenomenon after it reappeared in Japan in the 1980s <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudoku>
  - b. It is a logic puzzle which uses numbers, but it’s not about math
  - c. You just have to line up the numbers 1 through 9 over and over in the 81 boxes in the grid

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 3 |   |   | 7 |   |   |   |   |
| 6 |   |   | 1 | 9 | 5 |   |   |   |
|   | 9 | 8 |   |   |   |   | 6 |   |
| 8 |   |   |   | 6 |   |   |   | 3 |
| 4 |   |   | 8 |   | 3 |   |   | 1 |
| 7 |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | 6 |
|   | 6 |   |   |   |   | 2 | 8 |   |
|   |   |   | 4 | 1 | 9 |   |   | 5 |
|   |   |   |   | 8 |   |   | 7 | 9 |

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 2 |
| 6 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 8 |
| 1 | 9 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8 | 5 | 9 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 2 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 9 | 1 |
| 7 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 6 |
| 9 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 8 | 4 |
| 2 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 5 |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 7 | 9 |

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudoku> Puzzle by Tim Stellmach, CC0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=57831926>  
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- d. The nine numbers have to line up (in a unique order)
  - i. in each of the horizontal rows
  - ii. in each of the vertical columns
  - iii. AND in each of the nine internal grids within the grid.
- e. So in a way, it’s three puzzles working hand in hand
- f. It’s very clever and it has only one solution per puzzle
- g. The puzzle is presented to us in different levels of difficulty
  - i. So an easier puzzle will have many of the numbers already filling the grid,
  - ii. While a harder puzzle will have far fewer of the numbers already there
  - iii. and then you begin to figure it out using logic (getting clues from what numbers are already on a given horizontal row, the vertical column, and the internal grids)

- h. Or maybe you like crossword puzzles, which require general knowledge to fill the blanks. It also has one solution.
    - i. Or maybe you enjoy a game of chess, which is kind of a puzzle, but it has nearly endless possibilities or solutions as you and your opponent move the pieces.
- 2. In our gospel passage today, the Pharisees were trying to figure out a puzzle: when and how would the Realm of God come?
  - a. In our translation today, the term for Realm is cleverly rendered “Majesty” of God which opens up some very interesting possibilities for grasping that concept
  - b. Jesus had spoken throughout his ministry of the Realm / Majesty of God as something that he had to announce, and something which had come near to them.
  - c. The Pharisees’ question here is pretty straight forward: when will it get here?
    - i. Or, if you’re not going to give us the answer, at least give us some clues so we can work it out ourselves
    - ii. After all, if perceived as a government structure, a literal Realm of the Land, anyone wanting to get on the “good side” of the coming ruler would want to have a heads up
    - iii. And it wasn’t just the Pharisees asking for these kind of spoilers from Jesus. Elsewhere his own disciples, curious or impatient, also ask Jesus for clues or for the answer to this and similar puzzles. Just tell us WHEN!
  - d. To their surprise, and perhaps to ours too, Jesus tells them that the Majesty of God is not coming in a way that we’d notice as if it were the birth of a baby, or the grand opening of a store, or even the change of who governs the land.
  - e. Perhaps most surprising of all is the next sentence “For, see here, the majesty of God is among you all.”
    - i. Another translation says “it is WITHIN you.”
    - ii. So if the Majesty of God is among us and within us, what does that mean?
  - f. Well, for one, this puzzle has a solution that we’re carrying within us or among us
    - i. We carry the Majesty of God just as we carry the likeness of God, since we’re made in the image of God
    - ii. With the clues that Jesus gives with his love-centered teachings,
      - 1. and his courageous actions to welcome everyone,
      - 2. here he is telling us that understanding the fullness of God’s Majesty will require looking deep within us to find God at work in us,
      - 3. and looking purposefully at what we all bring together to find how God is working through all of us.
- 3. When a community is trying to solve a troubling puzzle, a problem which is difficult to figure out, it would serve us well to remember that Jesus says the Majesty / the Realm of God is already among us and within us
  - a. There is a temptation to think that solutions to really big problems need an outside intervention, some outside expert to come and tell us what the solution to the puzzle is
  - b. But if we lean into the wisdom that Jesus is giving us about the Majesty of God, we come to recognize that God is already active within us and within the community in a way that uniquely prepares us to discover and activate that solution to the puzzle.

- c. The solution for that Sudoku puzzle sits right there inside it, ready to emerge if we sit with it long enough
  - d. John McKnight and Peter Block wrote in their book *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*: “Our communities are abundant with the resources we need for the future. It is the awakening of families and neighborhoods to these resources that is needed.”
  - e. And that’s where we come in as a congregation, as a group of people trying to live faithful and committed lives, investing ourselves in our common life as a community
    - i. We look at the gifts which each of us brings, and to the internal guidance which God has put in our hearts
    - ii. We are attentive to the wisdom of God in children and seniors and everything in between, people with a wide variety of experiences, new to leadership or with years of service, with a passion to help, with a call to work for justice
    - iii. Ours then is the job of awakening our neighbors to the incredible abundance of wisdom and resources we have to address the challenges facing us.
  - f. And if we can activate that kind of movement within a congregation or a community, we can work with others to scale that up to larger and larger contexts
  - g. You see, Jesus didn’t say that only the smart, or the holy, or the rich, or the connected can solve the puzzle... That would discourage us from taking part.
4. Instead we affirm that the Majesty of God is ALREADY within us and among us, so our journey to learn what that means for us can be part of the journey to discover the solutions ALREADY among us to the puzzles we face together.