

3 after Trinity Year B 2021

It isn't very often that we get a reading from the Book of Job - this year there will be five, next year two, and the following year no Sunday readings at all from Job - so we must make the most of this opportunity.

Job is a book which seeks to answer the ubiquitous, agonising question - 'Why do bad things happen to good people?', or, on a more personal level, 'What have I done to deserve this?'

Throughout the book, Job challenges God with that personal, affronted question - 'What have I done to deserve this?' - and supplies his own answer - nothing - I've done nothing to deserve all the suffering I am going through. Job demands of God an answer to his question - 'Let the Almighty answer me' (31.35).

Job, like most of us most of the time, sees a connection between sin and suffering - 'he got what he deserved'. We find this attitude in some of the lament psalms, where the psalmist asks for relief from distress which he understands is due to sinfulness - 'We are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance'. (Ps90.7, 8).

But it isn't always that way. Even amongst the psalms there are stout claims for personal justice, and cries to God to honour that justice. 'Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering'. (Ps26.1). Job could easily, and truthfully, have said that. Moreover, the universal recognition of the plight of the poor and oppressed, whose condition cannot simply be due to sinfulness, but due to the sins and oppression of others - so frequently condemned by the prophets - also points to the mystery of suffering. What have they done to deserve this? Nothing!

Biblically speaking, we cannot say that good deeds always bring good results, nor that bad deeds bring suffering. We cannot look at the suffering of Job and say he got what he deserved, because he didn't 'deserve' what happened to him. The author of the Book of Job clearly shows us that we cannot infer wrongdoing from misfortune.

Eventually, after 37 chapters of debate about Job's suffering, God replies - today's reading. But He gives no answer to the question 'why?' The reading begins with 'The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind', and then, what Job gets is not answers, but questions. 'Where were you?' 'Who determined?' 'Who shut up

the sea?' We have just eleven verses, but *God's* questions and His description of his works go on for four chapters, until he - *God* - finally asks 'Shall a fault-finder contend with the Almighty?'

There is no answer to the question 'why?', no answer to the riddle of undeserved suffering. Instead, in *God's* delightful four chapters, we have a description of *God's* love for everything he has made, his delight in the natural world; *God*, for some inscrutable reason, shows himself in all kinds of created beauty, including humankind. Job's question, our question, is never answered, except - *God* answers. That is the miracle, that is the joy, the chaos is still there, but so is *God*, in the midst of all the pain and mess, *God* is there. And that is, or should be, enough. It is enough for Job.

The chaos for the disciples in their night time journey to the other side is caused by a sudden storm - a frequent occurrence on the *Sea of Galilee*. A rapid change of weather causes the waves to break into the boat, so that it starts to fill. In the midst of their fright, *Jesus* sleeps. Just as Job makes demands of *God* - 'Let the Almighty answer me' - so the disciples demand something from *Jesus* - although what that something is they probably don't know - but something, do something, please! 'Do

you not care that we are perishing?' How many times have you said that to *God*? = Do you not care? Why don't you fix this for me?, or on a larger scale, how can *God* allow this, that or the other to happen? Where is *God*? Why doesn't He do something? Mark is writing for a Christian community facing persecution for their faith. He is telling them, telling us, that life won't be all plain sailing, that there will be storms, whirlwinds, violence, various kinds of personal suffering - and the apparent silence of *God*, which leaves us crying 'Do you not care?' Only when we have articulated that pain, that resentment, that anger, can we be still and listen for the word *God* speaks - peace, be still.

We know we are on a journey to *God*, and that *Jesus* is with us on that journey - and we know there will be storms, and moments of doubt or fear. They, the disciples, were on a night time journey to 'the other side', to dangerous *Gentile* territory. Paul lists all the hazards he had had, during his travels in *Gentile* territory. What kept Paul going, what kept the disciples going, what keeps us going, is the strenuous, unshakable belief that *Jesus* is Lord over all this chaos, that there is no storm that will not be stilled, at the last, by the peace of his presence. Why? Because we know the answer to the disciples' question - 'Who then is this, that

even the wind and sea obey him?' Mark has already told us -

Chapter 1, verse 1 - The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The story of the stilling of the storm is about the revelation of that truth, an epiphany moment for the disciples, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Word made flesh, the bringer of the kingdom of God, the bringer of peace.

'And all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.'