

Sunday 6th October 2024

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Introduction – The book of Job and faith

Today the lectionary invites us to remember the book of Job. The book of Job is a story of faith in adversity, of resisting temptation, and a lesson in our relationship with God. Job is an upright citizen, a good man, and a man of faith. He trusts God. The start of the story reminds us that in the days of Job people understood there to be a heavenly council comprising God, the angels and the Accuser, one referred to as The Satan. God and the Accuser are perceived to often have debates and here we are told the Accuser suggests that people only praise God because they are afraid of God and what might happen if they do not praise him.

When we refer back to the golden era of church we often forget that the pews were filled by factory workers who dare not miss church for fear of losing their jobs. Fear has been a great controller. In our story, God refutes the suggestion and sites Job as an example of someone who will stand firm, he has so much confidence in Job that he tells the Accuser to strike him with all sorts of disasters, loss of job and belongings, plagues, etc. It is an horrendous story of misery and misfortune but throughout we are told Job stands firm. His wife tempts him to turn from God, his friends suggest he must have done something really bad and we are shown all the ways in which we might be tempted to turn from God, or to blame God. Job eventually shouts at God – what more do you want from me – he is confused, and we read that God answers in the strangest way, reminding Job of his might and wonder through detailing all the things of creation. It is a story of its time, and our understanding of God has changed through time but the central premise is of God's eternal presence in creation, and the invitation to remember our relationship with God no matter what happens in life.

[Story](#) Oscar and Hoo by Theo

Reflection

Who do you blame when things go wrong? It is very easy to blame others when really what we are facing are the consequences of decisions we have taken. Reflecting on the third commandment which says 'Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain', the Dutch children's Bible 'In the beginning' interprets it as 'When you hit your finger with a hammer do not go shouting my name as if it were my fault'. It makes us pause for thought about how often our language gives the wrong impression about our faith. Of course our actions also affect others but that may not be obvious, so who do they blame? We are all connected and we share responsibility.

In the film Patch Adams, Patch, like Job, has a pretty tough time and overcomes depression by discovering a passion for helping others. He wants to be a doctor and enrolls for training but gets frustrated by the impersonal way patients are treated. He challenges the system. Patch believes in what he is called to do, he believes in God, then a good friend is killed doing what Patch has encouraged his friends to do – helping others. He is devastated and his faith falters, he stands on the edge of a cliff and shouts at God, what more do you want from me. Suddenly, a butterfly appears, it rests on his bag, then it lands on his shirt and stays there. As he watches it he remembers his friend sharing her childhood dream of escaping her abuser by becoming a butterfly. In that moment Patch knows, and his faith is restored. Sometimes we have to look outwards when we are tempted to become self centred, just like Job we are invited to look beyond our circumstances to the bigger picture,

and to trust. Life is rarely black and white, rarely simple, God's presence is found in the kaleidoscope colours of the rainbow.

We are all interconnected because we are all a part of God. When we understand this we see things differently. Faith in God is not an insurance policy against bad things happening. How we deal with those things is what shows our faith. Look at our example, Jesus, he faced some horrific things but he kept faith. Through his teachings and stories we are invited to see God in a new way and to understand our relationship with God in a new way. Relationships are forever, Jesus touched on this in the language of his day, in Mark 10.

Reading Mark 10:2-9 ([The Message](#))

Relationships are forever even though sometimes we feel separate. There are so many situations that tempt us to lose faith in the oneness of which we are a part. Think of the parents of a stillborn child or a neonatal death, think of children who grow away from a parent, parents who lose touch with their children, divorce, and of course death. Jesus tells us that none of these things separate us, we are still connected even when circumstances suggest otherwise. Imagine the difference it would make to be able to understand our connection fully, to know that everything is eternally connected and at a sub-conscious level we can still feel that connection.

There is a moment in the film *Chicken Run* when the chickens are trying and failing to escape, Rocky, their 'saviour', says 'it is not the fences around the farm that keep you in but the fences around your brains'. Jesus removed the fences, encouraging a totally new perspective of our relationship with God. The attitude of Job's friends and others like them reduces God to a moral bookkeeper, Jesus' teaching raises God to a presence deep within, a presence within which we can question and examine life's experiences and then share with others the love we find in our relationship with God, and the courage we find in knowing we are a part of the eternal pattern of creation and can never be separated.

When we are tempted to blame others, blame God even, we need to see the bigger picture and learn from our experience growing deeper in our understanding of the oneness of creation and the responsibility we have to make love the core of life rather than fear.