

**Lectionary Readings:** Job 39:1 – 40:4 *or*  
 Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 43: 13-33  
 Psalm 91: 1-12 (13-16)  
 Hebrews 12: 1-17  
 Luke 12: 32-40

This week we have the last of Old Testament and Apocrypha alternatives from Job and Sirach/Ecclesiasticus. The reading from Job comes from near the end of the ‘book’. Following the ‘Interlude on Wisdom’ (last week) we have a series of Monologues:

- A. Job’s Call for Vindication (chapters 29-31)
- B. Elihu’s Speeches (chapters 32-37)
- C. **Divine Discourses** (chapter 38 to chapter 42, verse 6)

There are four sections to the Divine Discourses:

- 1. God’s first discourse (38:1-40:2)
- 2. Job’s response (40:3-5)
- 3. God’s second discourse (40:6-41:34)
- 4. Job’s repentance (42: 1-6)

The reading today is the latter part of God’s first discourse and the first two, from the four verses of Job’s response.

The Lord asks Job a whole sequence of questions concerning wild and domestic animals. Only verses 13-18 contain no question or are not associated with a question that has been asked. A study footnote in the NIV Study Bible comments:

This stanza (13-18) is unique in the discourses, because in it the Lord asks Job no questions. Could it be because the ostrich is so amusing?

Commenting on “*wings and feathers of the stork*” or “*pinions and feathers of the stork*” (depending on the NIV version read) it is noted that a stork’s wings were particularly impressive (see the ‘vision’ in Zechariah 5):

#### **The woman in a basket**

<sup>5</sup>Then the angel who was speaking to me came forward and said to me, ‘Look up and see what is appearing.’

<sup>6</sup>I asked, ‘What is it?’

He replied, ‘It is a basket.’ And he added, ‘This is the iniquity<sup>a</sup> of the people throughout the land.’

<sup>7</sup>Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman!

<sup>8</sup>He said, ‘This is wickedness,’ and he pushed her back into the basket and pushed its lead cover down on it.

<sup>9</sup>**Then I looked up – and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings!**

**They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between heaven and earth.**

<sup>10</sup>‘Where are they taking the basket?’ I asked the angel who was speaking to me.

<sup>11</sup>He replied, ‘To the country of Babylonia<sup>b</sup> to build a house for it.

When the house is ready, the basket will be set there in its place.’

#### **Footnotes**

a. [Zechariah 5:6](#) Or *appearance*

b. [Zechariah 5:11](#) Hebrew *Shinar*

At the beginning of chapter 40 we have the conclusion of the first divine discourse and once again, God challenges Job to answer him. Job, however, is duly chastened and is unwilling to speak another word of complaint:

<sup>1</sup>The LORD said to Job:

<sup>2</sup>‘Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!’

<sup>3</sup>Then Job answered the LORD:

<sup>4</sup>‘I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth.

Turning to the final chapter of Job (42), we first read Job’s repentance – the last part of the ‘Divine Discourses’ - then in an epilogue, God’s Verdict and Job’s Restoration:

Then Job replied to the LORD:

<sup>2</sup>‘I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

<sup>3</sup>You asked, “Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?” Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.

<sup>4</sup>‘You said, “Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.”

<sup>5</sup>My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.

<sup>6</sup>Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.’

## Epilogue

- <sup>7</sup> After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.
- <sup>8</sup> So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.'
- <sup>9</sup> So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.
- <sup>10</sup> After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before.
- <sup>11</sup> All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver<sup>a</sup> and a gold ring.
- <sup>12</sup> The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys.
- <sup>13</sup> And he also had seven sons and three daughters.
- <sup>14</sup> The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch.
- <sup>15</sup> Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.
- <sup>16</sup> After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation.
- <sup>17</sup> And so Job died, an old man and full of years.

### Footnotes

- a. [Job 42:11](#) Hebrew *him a kesitah*; a kesitah was a unit of money of unknown weight and value.

The Oxford Bible Commentary, in its Apocrypha 'edition', describes Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 42:15-43:33 as a **"Hymn to the Creator"** – the complete NRSV text for this section being reproduced last week along with a 'breakdown' of groups of verses within "the hymn".

Our reading today commences towards the end of the list of the 'works of creation'. Among those mentioned are snow-storms, lightning, clouds, hailstones, thunder, earthquakes, wind (squalls and hurricanes), snow-flakes, frost, icicles and solid ice, scorching heat, dew and huge sea-monsters.

The final seven verses conclude "the hymn" with a call to praise. The first of these completes that list by saying *"We could say more but never enough"* (NRSV) or *"However much we say, we cannot exhaust our theme"* (NEB) and giving the final word *"He is the all"* (NRSV) or *"He is all"* (NEB):

(NRSV)

- <sup>27</sup> **We could say more but could never say enough; let the final word be: "He is the all."**
- <sup>28</sup> Where can we find the strength to praise him? For he is greater than all his works.
- <sup>29</sup> Awesome is the Lord and very great, and marvellous is his power.
- <sup>30</sup> Glorify the Lord and exalt him as much as you can, for he surpasses even that.  
When you exalt him, summon all your strength, and do not grow weary, for you cannot praise him enough.
- <sup>31</sup> Who has seen him and can describe him? Or who can extol him as he is?
- <sup>32</sup> Many things greater than these lie hidden, for I have seen but few of his works.
- <sup>33</sup> **For the Lord has made all things, and to the godly he has given wisdom.**

(NEB)

- <sup>27</sup> However much we say, we cannot exhaust our theme; to put it in a word: he is all.
- <sup>28</sup> Where can we find the skill to sing his praises? For he is greater than all his works.
- <sup>29</sup> The Lord is terrible and very great, and marvellous is his power.
- <sup>30</sup> Honour the Lord to the best of your ability, and he will still be high above all praise.  
Summon all your strength to declare his greatness, and be untiring, for the most you can do will fall short.
- <sup>31</sup> Has anyone ever seen him, to be able to describe him? Can anyone praise him as he truly is?
- <sup>32</sup> We have seen but a small part of his works, and there remain many mysteries greater still.
- <sup>33</sup> **The Lord has made everything and has given wisdom to the godly.**

As I read the opening two verses of Psalm 91 I have, immediately, the melody and words of a Chris Bowater song of the 1980s going round in my mind – a song which is based directly on these verses:

He who dwells,  
He who dwells  
In the shelter of the Most High  
(Repeat)

Will rest in the shadow,  
The shadow of the Almighty  
(Repeat)

And I'll say of the Lord He is my refuge,  
And I'll say of the Lord He is my strength,  
And I'll make of the Most High One My dwelling place,  
And I'll say He is my God,  
I'll say He is my God,  
And I'll say, He is my God in whom I trust

As many of you will know I have had the privilege of worshipping where Chris has been the “Worship Leader” (and I rate him very highly but see his own comments below!).

He is a classically trained musician – which shows in the quality of his many songs.

To Chris, worship is a lifestyle and he senses a special personal gifting of the Holy Spirit when he sits at the keyboard, but not as a “Leader of Worship” – He says “I don't think that I can actually lead people in worship. I can only lead people to worship, and that's my role. Many years ago, in a prophecy, I was told that I should be like an Asaph. He was the chief musician in the time of David but his name means “one who gathers the people together then removes their sense of condemnation”... that's a lovely name.”

I was very surprised to discover that the song above is not included in any of the six volumes of Songs of Fellowship!

Last week, in Psalm 88 we saw a cry from the depths – a psalmist almost in despair. This week we have the complete opposite – the NIV Study Bible in its introduction to the psalm says:

A glowing testimony to the security of those who trust in God. It was probably written by one of the temple personnel (a priest or Levite) as a word of assurance to godly worshippers. Because the “you” of verses 3-13 applies to any of the godly who “make the Most High your dwelling” (v.9), the “you” in verses 11-12 was applied by the devil to Jesus at the time of His temptation (Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10-11).

Structurally, the psalm is divided into two halves of eight verses each, with the opening couplet of the second half (vv.9-10) echoing the theme of vv.1-2. In the first half, the godly are assured of security from four threats (vv.5-6) – though thousands fall. (The terror of night, The arrow that flies by day, The pestilence that stalks in the darkness, The plague that destroys at midday). In the second half they are assured of triumphing over four menacing beasts (v.13). (Lion, Cobra, Great Lion, Serpent).

The oracle of vv.14-16 offers climactic assurance:

**14 ‘Because he (probably the king) loves me,’ says the LORD, ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.**

**15 He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him.**

**16 With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.’**

In verse 1, where we read “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the *Almighty*” the Hebrew which is translated into English as *Almighty* is familiar to us from Bible passages and from songs – it is *El Shaddai*.

On Chris Bowater’s CD “*Personal Worship – intimate reflections to a faithful God*” there is a different (and possibly earlier) version of the “He who dwells” song:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
Will rest in the shadow of El Shaddai  
(Repeat)

I will say of the Lord  
He is my refuge and my fortress  
My God in whom I trust  
El Shaddai  
My God in whom I trust  
El Shaddai

We occasionally find verses of Scripture, out of context, in strange places! Continuing the ‘musical’ theme and in this light we turn to Mendelssohn’s Oratorio, ‘Elijah’.

Fire has been called down on Mount Carmel and Elijah exhorts the people to ‘slay’ the prophets of Baal – Part 1 of the Oratorio concluding with the Chorus, “Thanks be to God! He laveth the thirsty land!”

We remember from 1 Kings that the “triumphant” Elijah seeks isolated refuge – he appears to be defeated rather than triumphant. Part 2 of the Oratorio reflects this part of the story, opening with a Soprano air (“Hear Ye, Israel) followed by the Chorus (“Be not afraid”). It is in this Chorus that we find a quotation from Psalm 91!

Soprano aria

Hear ye, Israel, hear what the Lord speaketh:  
'Oh, hadst thou heeded my commandments'  
Who hath believed our report! To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed!  
Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One to him oppressed by tyrants,  
thus saith the Lord:  
'I am He that comforteth.  
Be not afraid, for I am thy God! I will strengthen thee!  
Say, who art thou, that thou art afraid of a man that shall die; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker,  
who hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the earth's foundations? Say, who art thou!'

Chorus

'Be not afraid,' saith God the Lord, 'be not afraid, thy help is near!  
God, the Lord, thy God, saith unto thee: 'Be not afraid!'

**Though thousands languish and fall beside thee, and tens of thousands around thee perish,  
yet still it shall not come nigh thee.**

It is often difficult to understand why librettists choose particular Biblical verses! Mendelssohn apparently worked, and often disagreed, with three different individuals. One old family friend – a Pastor – wanted to stress the ‘sacred’ side of the story – the young Mendelssohn was far more interested in the dramatic side, expressed through the music.

We continue with readings from the Letter to the Hebrews. Last week, the set passage spelt out the faith of the ‘giants’ of Jewish history. In Lectionary Thoughts, for that week, we concluded the section on faith with the remaining verses of Hebrews 11 - starting with a further list of named faithful and then becoming more general as it describes the sufferings etc. of God’s people throughout time.

In the final verse of chapter 11 – his readership are mentioned for the first time in this passage:

<sup>39</sup> These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had planned something better for **us** so that only **together with us** would they be made perfect.

The writer now turns more fully to us: (Chapter 12)

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since **we** are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let **us** throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And **let us** run with perseverance the race marked out for **us**, <sup>2</sup> **fixing our eyes** on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

<sup>3</sup> **Consider him** who endured such opposition from sinners, so that **you** will not grow weary and lose heart.

The passage that follows is quite daunting – there are two sections, the first headed “**God disciplines his children**” and the second “**Warning and encouragement**”.

The first section deals with God disciplining his children – looking on the process in the way a human father disciplines his children. In the course of his writing, the author quotes two passages from the Book of Proverbs. In verses 5-6 we read:

<sup>5</sup> And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son?

It says,

*‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,*

*<sup>6</sup> because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.*

*Proverbs 3: 11-12*

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. <sup>13</sup> **‘Make level paths for your feet,’** so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

*Proverbs 4: 26*

Other verses which stand out in this section are:

<sup>7</sup> Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children.

For what children are not disciplined by their father?

<sup>8</sup> If you are not disciplined – and everyone undergoes discipline – then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.

We must ask the question - Are we aware of being disciplined, and if not can we claim to be true sons and daughters?

<sup>11</sup> No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.

Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

The first two verses of the “**Warning and encouragement**” are ‘general’, applying to us all; the final two start with a warning to us all but then drop back into Jewish history:

<sup>14</sup> **Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.**

<sup>15</sup> **See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.**

<sup>16</sup> **See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless.....**

.....like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.

<sup>17</sup> Afterwards, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected.

Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

There is a note in the NIV Study Bible on “*missing*” or “*falling short*” or “*fails to lay hold*” of the grace of God. Such an experience, it says, has been described in two earlier passages of Hebrews:

<sup>1</sup> We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

<sup>2</sup> For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, <sup>3</sup> how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

<sup>4</sup> God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Hebrews 2: 1-4

<sup>4</sup> It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age <sup>6</sup> and who have fallen<sup>a</sup> away, to be brought back to repentance.

To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

<sup>7</sup> Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.

<sup>8</sup> But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

Hebrews 6: 4-8

#### Footnotes

a. [Hebrews 6:6](#) Or age, <sup>6</sup> if they fall

The theme from last week's reading, found earlier in Luke 12, was similar to that which we see today – focussing on material possessions and our attitude to them. The verses, from chapter 12, that have not been included in the Lectionary at this time constitute a very well known passage on this theme:

**Do not worry**

- <sup>22</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples: 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.  
<sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.  
<sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!  
<sup>25</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour (*or cubit*) to your life?  
<sup>26</sup> Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?  
<sup>27</sup> 'Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.  
<sup>28</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you – you of little faith!  
<sup>29</sup> And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.  
<sup>30</sup> For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.  
<sup>31</sup> **But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.**

That last verse reminds us of the well known and loved 'song/hymn' by Karen Lafferty:

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,  
and his righteousness,  
and all these things shall be added unto you;  
Allelu-, alleluia:

*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,  
allelu-, alleluia!*

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;  
seek and ye shall find;  
knock and the door shall be opened unto you;  
Allelu-, alleluia:

We shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word  
that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;  
Allelu-, alleluia:

Returning to the reading today, Jesus says to his disciples:

- <sup>32</sup> 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.  
<sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions and give to the poor.  
Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.  
<sup>34</sup> **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

There is a salutary warning to each of us in verse 34 – what is the most important thing in our thinking and in our lives?

The next section, to the end of our reading, is headed "**Watchfulness**". The equivalent passage in Matthew's Gospel is in the form of a "parable" – that of the ten virgins waiting for the return of the bridegroom. We remember that five were wise and had additional oil for their lamps, five were foolish and their lamps had gone out before the bridegroom arrived. They were not ready for his coming.

In Luke 12 we read:

- <sup>5</sup> 'Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, <sup>36</sup> like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.  
<sup>37</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes.  
Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will make them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.  
<sup>38</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or towards daybreak.  
<sup>39</sup> But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.  
<sup>40</sup> **You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.'**

The early church believed, often reflected in the New Testament Scriptures, that the return of Jesus was imminent. Two thousand years have passed without this happening but we still say that no one knows the year, the month, the day, the hour, but He will come and we should be on our guard and ready whenever it is.

The “**Watchfulness**” section of Luke 12 continues after our reading – to the end of the chapter:

<sup>41</sup> Peter asked, ‘Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?’

<sup>42</sup> The Lord answered, ‘Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?’

<sup>43</sup> It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns.

<sup>44</sup> Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

<sup>45</sup> But suppose the servant says to himself, “My master is taking a long time in coming,” and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk.

<sup>46</sup> The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

<sup>47</sup> ‘The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows.

<sup>48</sup> But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows.

**From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded;  
and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.**

Enthroned thy God within thy heart,  
Thy being’s inmost shrine;  
He doth to thee the power implant  
To live the life divine.

Seek truth in Him with Christlike mind;  
With faith His will discern;  
Walk on life’s way with Him, and find  
Thy heart within thee burn.

With love that overflows thy soul  
Love Him who first loved thee;  
Is not His love thy life, thy goal,  
Thy soul’s eternity?

Serve Him in His sufficing strength:  
Heart, mind and soul employ;  
And He shall crown thy days at length  
With everlasting joy.

W. J. Penn

Let Him to whom we now belong  
His sovereign right assert,  
And take up every thankful song  
And every loving heart.

He justly claims us for His own,  
Who bought us with a price;  
The Christian lives to Christ alone,  
To Christ alone he dies.

Jesus, Thine own at last receive,  
Fulfil our heart’s desire,  
And let us to Thy glory live,  
And in Thy cause expire.

Our souls and bodies we resign;  
With joy we render Thee  
Our all, no longer ours, but Thine  
To all eternity.

Charles Wesley