

TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

Half Acre, Horton Heath, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JS
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Sunday Scriptures: 3rd October 2021

Scriptures: NRSV

Job 1:1:... ¹There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

Job 1:6-12:... ⁶One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. ⁷The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." ⁸The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil." ⁹Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰Have You not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹But stretch out Your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse You to Your face." ¹²The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, all that he has is in your power, only do not stretch out your hand against him!" So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

Job 2:1-10:... ¹One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. ²The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.' ³The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him for no reason." ⁴Then Satan answered the Lord, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. ⁵But stretch out Your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse You to Your face." ⁶The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life." ⁷So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes. ⁹Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." ¹⁰But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Reflection:

There are many lessons to be learnt from the story of Job; the following are just three of them: **One:** Satan cannot harm us without God's permission! **Two:** God will never allow us to suffer more than He knows we can bear. **Three:** We can trust God to see us through life one day at a time, just as He did with Job. One of the main questions asked of me by those enquiring about my faith is: 'Why does God allow such suffering in the world?' My answer is an honest one, "I don't know", but then if I had all the answers there would be no need for faith! There are some questions in life we will never have the answers for, and indeed it may be better for us not to know! It is easier when things go wrong to blame God and turn away, than to pray and praise Him in all circumstances. Yet this is exactly what Job does. Satan will attack our mind and try to convince us that God has abandoned us and doesn't care. Yet, God promises to always be with and within those who believe. When life becomes challenging and we are tested through dire circumstances, false accusation, ill health and things beyond our control, we are at our most vulnerable. Such times of testing are just when we need to turn to God and place ourselves at His mercy and grace. Faith is our sword of Truth that reminds us of the promises written in the Word of God, strengthens our belief and forms our trust. Anything

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that seeks to change or undermine this is most definitely the work of the devil. *How truthful are we before God? How truthful are we with ourselves? How truthful are we with others?*

One: *Satan cannot harm us without God's permission.* This is TRUTH because the Word of God tells us so! We all come from different backgrounds, cultures and life experience, which means we will all have a slightly different perspective on things. We may be able to understand the experience of another up-to-a-point, but never exactly, because we are not that person and we have not experienced what they have or in the same way. If you have ever tried on someone else's glasses you will know that it just does not work! Your vision is perhaps even more blurry than it was without or it hurts your eyes or both! Yet, for the owner of those glasses it clears their vision and comforts their eyes. From this we can conclude that someone else's vision is not always right for us. This is demonstrated by the reaction of Job's wife to the suffering imposed on her husband. Therefore, an open mind and placing ourselves in the shoes of another becomes essential to discern right from wrong. The Word of God provides the right lens for us to see clearly and comfort the spiritual eyes of our soul.

What lens might we be looking through? Is our vision clear or blurred by someone else's? How open is our mind to the mystery of God's grace?

The Bible tells of heavenly councils where angels are required to give account of themselves before God (1 Kings 22:19-23). Satan was originally an angel of God, but became corrupt through his own pride. He became God's enemy from the conception of his rebellion (1 John 3:8) and has been busy doing evil ever since. He never attacks where we are strong but looks for the weakest place to try and break us. Beware of temptation (1 Pet 5:8-9) its only power is held within our desires! However, Satan is still accountable to God Who knows his every thought, limits him to one place at a time and scrutinises his accusations before granting any permissions. All evil is limited by the authority of God and can do only what the Almighty permits (Luke 22:31-32 1 Tim 1:19-20 2 Tim 2:23-26). Satan can do nothing without God's say-so! A well-known saying advises, 'The devil is in the detail', and his greatest weapon is to undermine faith with doubt! Eve was tempted through doubt when Satan questioned God's instructions; 'Did God really say...?' Some might distinguish between a black or a white lie, but the Word of God has no such distinction. Any and every distortion of Truth is a lie and stands against God's Word to deceive His people (Gen 3:1-6). Make no mistake, Satan hates God and anyone who loves Him becomes a target for attack. He is not interested in those who doubt or do not believe because they pose no threat. When we see people suffering for no apparent reason, like Job, it can shake our faith. The same goes for prayers that are seemingly unanswered, which may lead us to question what we believe in. I cannot offer any explanation or provide any answers for these times, but what I can do is confirm that God is Truth and His Word is the foundation on which we can stand secure. As Jesus told the woman with the issue, "Your faith has made you well" (Matthew 9:20-22), so we too can trust the promises of His Word.

Does pride threaten our divine protection? Are we guilty of corrupting Truth in our own favour? Is our faith standing firm on the Word of God?

Two: *God will never allow us to suffer more than He knows we can bear.* Faith based on rewards or prosperity is hollow. Faith built on the confidence that God's ultimate purpose will come to pass is unshakeable. God knew the stuff of which Job was made, how? Because God made him to His own design, just as He has made each person. No person is born corrupt, it

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is our own life choices that form our character and faith that determines whether we will achieve what God hopes of us or not. Even when our situation looks hopeless and we find ourselves in the midst of trials, we have a choice to respond by asking “Why me?” or praying “Use me”. God permitted Satan to attack Job in an especially harsh manner. Although God loves us, faith and obedience to Him will not shelter us from the world’s corruption or life’s disasters. Setbacks, tragedies, and sorrows strike Christian and non-Christian people alike. Adversity exposes counterfeit faith by destroying it and strengthens real faith by inspiring believers to send deeper roots into their Creator God. My father’s favourite hymn, ‘Will Your Anchor Hold’ suggests that when storms break, we need to throw our anchor out into the depths of God, where it will hold us fast in His love. Satan questioned Job’s motivation as one of reward, suggesting his love for God was fake and self-serving. But despite the severity of God’s test, Job did not doubt, nor blame, nor curse God! He chose instead to praise the Almighty he knew and hold fast to the anchor of God’s promises. Some only believe God when everything is going well or to claim the benefits of belonging to a Christian community. Such as these are the first to fall away or blame God when benefits turn to challenge. Job was able to suffer more than he thought he could bear, because he trusted God to know what his limits were.

Who, or what, do we hold on to in the face of adversity? Are we motivated by love of God or love of self? Will the roots of our faith anchor us to God through the storms of life?

Three: *We can trust God to see us through life one day at a time, just as He did with Job.* Some might say that we must be happy and positive all the time to demonstrate the Lord is in our life. What rubbish! Job did not hide the overwhelming grief and sorrow of his unprecedented circumstances. His display of emotion was a natural human response and did not demonstrate a loss of faith in God, far from it! Instead Job showed unwavering devotion to God’s authority, despite his circumstances. Did Jesus not weep over Jerusalem and demonstrate anger in the temple? God created us to experience emotions, both as a release and for protection. God knows that life is tough; Jesus experienced the emotional roller-coaster of life for Himself and they both know that we are weak. Whilst it may be sinful to act upon our emotions inappropriately, there is no sin in expressing them. While God may allow us to suffer beyond our understanding, He never leaves us to suffer alone. Job did not understand the reason for his suffering but he knew his life was in God's hands. He trusted God and remained faithful; he never gave in or gave up despite the severity of his situation. Job demonstrates a perspective broader than his own personal comfort; one that is other and beyond normal human or worldly understanding. Job feared God, turned away from evil and went forward in faith, one day at a time. We will all suffer in one way or another, at some point or another, but we will never be overcome if we grasp the hand of the Lord and our eyes are focussed on God, just one day at a time. **Amen!**

Hymn/Song: Will Your Anchor Hold *by* W.J.Kirkpatrick (1838-1921)

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

Chorus:...

We have an anchor that keeps the soul

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*Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
Fastened to the Rock, which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*

Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
When the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rave, and the wild winds blow,
Shall the angry waves then your barque o'erflow?

Chorus:

Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
When the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
While your anchor holds within the veil:

Chorus:

Will your eyes behold through the morning light
The city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
When life's storms are past for evermore?

Chorus:

Poem: IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS ©Janice Morgan-1998

*In the midst of swirling darkness a voice cries out to God
Desperation's voice, enclosed and alone, in a fearful pod
A rumble of thunder moves across the sky
A flash of lightning rent's the dark clouds' awry
The heart felt plea has reached God's listening ears
Such pain and fear sends forth God's sweet tears
The lonely one so desperate and with such pain
Is washed and comforted by God's tears of rain
All clouds are dispersed at His voice of thunder
All darkness must flee from His lightning of wonder
The one who calls God's name with heartfelt passion
Will be soaked in the rain of His loving compassion
No fear shall be known, no feeling alone
God's love reaches all who will look to His throne.*

Prayer:

Almighty God, You are the Author of our lives, the Creator of the universe, Your presence and being goes beyond our understanding: Be with us in our waking and our sleeping; protect us in our thinking and our seeing; guide us in our speaking and our doing; bless us in our successes and failures, joys and sorrows, triumphs and trials; grant to us the unshakeable faith of Job, that we might remain faithful and True to Your Word, will and purpose, now and always. **Amen!**