

TAKE TIME OUT – Pastoral Retreat

Half Acre, Horton Heath, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JS
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Sunday Scriptures: 24th October 2021

Scriptures: NRSV

Job 42:1-6 *Job repents for his lack of understanding*

¹Then Job answered the Lord; ²“I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.” *‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’* Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. *‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to Me.’* I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Job 42:7-9 *Job’s counsellors incur God’s wrath*

⁷After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has. ⁸Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has done.” ⁹So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them; and the Lord accepted Job’s prayer.

Job 42:10-17 *The Lord restores Job and more besides*

¹⁰And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. ¹¹Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. ¹²The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than the beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. ¹³He also had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. ¹⁵In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job’s daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. ¹⁶After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children’s children, four generations. ¹⁷And Job died, old and full of days.

Reflection:

The lectionary Scripture is the conclusion of the book of Job, a book that can teach us many lessons on living our faith. Job’s questions concerning his suffering are timeless, “Why do believers experience troubles and suffering?” or “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Despite a long and complex debate, Job’s supposedly ‘wise’ friends were unable to answer his questions or explain his suffering, just as we are unable to answer them today. Job’s counsellors or so-called ‘comforters’ made a serious error by attempting to fill the gaps in their understanding with human assumptions. Whilst their need to ‘fix it’ may have been well intentioned their assumption that Job must have caused his own suffering through sin was ill considered and pastorally destructive. Sadly, there are some people who make the same serious error today by trying to ‘fix’ what is in the realms of God’s purpose. Human assumptions that assert illness and suffering as the result of sin lack prayerful discernment and pastoral care. The Truth is that no one is perfect except God and His Son Jesus Christ. Bad things happen to bad **and** good people alike, because we all live in the same fallen and corrupt world. It is true that un-confessed sin gives Satan opportunity to make mischief and lack of faith may have the effect of limiting God’s blessings, but God does not cause

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suffering! Satan had to go before God and ask permission to mess with Job, and even then he was severely limited in what suffering he was allowed to inflict! God knew Job's heart and did not cause his suffering but instead protected his life throughout Satan's attacks. God is the ultimate authority and it is to Him we must give account of our lives on the day of judgement.

God knows our heart and will protect His people because He is a just, powerful and loving God that cares about us. God is mystery and we must accept that we are not meant to understand everything but to trust in faith. What we do know is that God loves us and whatever we have said or done; no matter what tragic consequences of our choices occur; Satan cannot touch us without permission from God. The Lord will not test us beyond what He knows to be our limit of endurance and He promises that the True Comforter, the Holy Spirit, will be with us through all we experience. We may have no answers as to why God allows evil, but we can be sure He is all-powerful, knows what He is doing, and is eager to forgive. Despite the machinations of evil, God often turns our trials and dilemmas around to serve for our good ([Romans 8:28](#)). One of the devil's greatest strongholds in our life is doubt! All that God asks of us is to remain faithful to His Word and follow the example of His Son Jesus Christ.

Job's contemporaries insisted he admit his sin and ask for forgiveness; Job did eventually repent but not in the way demanded by his 'comforters'. Job asked forgiveness, not for sins unknown, but for questioning God's sovereignty and justice. Job repented of his attitude and lack of understanding, acknowledging God's great power and perfect justice. *How often, when we find ourselves in difficulties, do we get angry and ask, "If God is in control, how could He let this happen?"* Life is messy and unpredictable but we sin when we replace faith with anger. Locked in the time and space of a finite existence we are unable to see beyond ourselves and subject to the frustrations of not being able to make sense of things. Therefore, we must often choose between understanding and trust, anger or faith. Job opened his heart to God and admitted that he was the one being foolish. The fact that God did not mention Job committing any sin is confirmation of his righteousness. In contrast, God rebukes Job's 'comforters', making it clear that they were wrong to judge him according to their own human understanding. Only God knows what God desires and how He intends to achieve it, therefore we must not judge. God may be working in ways we know nothing about to achieve what we could not even dream of. True faith begins with humility such as Job's to admit to God that we don't understand all things and are content to place what we do not know into His hands.

Do we have faith enough to trust God with our unanswered questions? Do we use what we can't understand as an excuse for our lack of trust?

Even after receiving much criticisms, reproofs, and misguided suggestions from his counsellors, Job still prays for them. It is difficult to forgive someone who has judged us wrongly and accused us falsely. However, Jesus said that anyone who loses something for the Kingdom of God will be repaid ([Luke 18:29-30](#)). Our restoration may or may not be along the same lines as Job's, which was both spiritual and material. But God not only restores whatever we have lost unjustly, He also gives back more than we can ever imagine. Our complete restoration may not occur in this life, but be assured it will come because God is just; He loves us and is full of grace.

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Do we repent of our attitude to question God's authority and justice? Can we trust God, without understanding, and regardless of our situation? Can we forgive those who have judged us wrongly, as Job did?

There are two forces competing against each other in the world, the one is for God and the other is for Satan. In the midst of all life's confusion and noise it is not always easy to discern the one from the other. But God sees our heart and He knows the Truth and in Him we put our trust. **Amen!**

Hymn/Song: I Need Thee Every Hour *By Annie Sherwood Hawks (1835-1918)*

I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord;
No tender voice like Thine can peace afford.

Chorus:...

*I need Thee, O I need Thee! Every hour I need Thee;
O bless me now, my Saviour! I come to Thee.*

I need Thee every hour, stay Thou near by;
Temptations lose their power when Thou art nigh.

Chorus:...

I need Thee every hour in joy or pain;
Come quickly and abide or life is vain.

Chorus:...

I need Thee every hour, teach me Thy will;
And Thy rich promises in me fulfil.

Chorus:...

I need Thee every hour, most Holy One;
O make me Thine indeed, Thou blessed Son!

Chorus:...

Poem: Where Will My Path Take Me? ©Janice Morgan *Taken from my journal Thursday 27th November 2001*

At a lunch with Blair Crawford in Bournemouth, the sun was low down in the sky and shining across the water creating a shimmering golden path over the sea. As I watched the brilliant light reflecting on a calm sea, I felt as though I could step out onto the path of light and walk in giant steps away beyond the horizon. Questions began to form in my mind and were prayerfully reflected on over a period of time resulting in the following prayers:...

What does God have in mind for me?
Will He lead me on a golden path paved with blessings?
Or will it be a slippery trail where one false move sees me slip and fail?
A path that sets me on solid ground or one that sees me sink under many burdens?
What mysteries will God unfold on the journey He ordained for me?
Please God I pray, whatever the path, may I walk Your way.

Where will my path take me?
Will I stay on familiar lands or sail the seas to foreign shores?
Does my path lead up to a place of light or down to places deep and dark?
Has my path a happy destiny or a tragic bereavement at the end of its trail?

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Will I find a house and a room all my own, or a crowded place that suffocates?
Please God I pray, wherever it leads, may You be there with me.

Who will I meet along the way?
Will they be friend or foe, supportive or destructive, people of faith or none?
What ministry will you give me, one that inspires and builds up?
Who will listen and who will reject, the love of Christ I hold dear?
A Truth teller You have made me to be, but not all will welcome Truth!
Please God I pray, whoever I meet, may they feel Your presence with me.

The path, the place, the people are not for me to decide.
You are my Father in heaven who will be my loving guide.
Your Son has made this possible and I will follow Him as best I can.
Jesus promised a spiritual Helper, so I will not be travelling alone.
Please God I pray, this and every day, help me read and live Your Word.

Prayer: Father God, many times have we acted with lack of understanding and inadvertently misrepresented You; we repent of our ignorance and arrogance, forgive us we pray. Lord Jesus, many times have we become Job's 'comforters' instead of Your wise counsellors; we repent of our lack of compassion and sensitivity to others needs, forgive us we pray. Holy Spirit, many times have we lost faith and trust in Your presence within; we repent of our lack of belief in Your power to heal and restore, forgive us we pray. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may we learn the lessons of Job and remain faithful. **Amen!**