

Hebrews 5. 1-10

Mark 10. 32-45

Jesus is on the road on the way to Jerusalem. The beloved son understands what he is going to, but the disciples seem to fail to understand, although, this is now the third time Jesus has told them of the grizzly confrontation that will take place in the city. Earlier in the gospel, in the account of the transfiguration, when Jesus goes up the mountain and meets Moses and Elijah, he is accompanied by Peter, and by the brothers James and John, who now ask him to sit on either side of him when Jesus is in his glory. They are all going *up* to Jerusalem, amazed and afraid, but the path Jesus is taking is a downward path, the path to betrayal, to condemnation, to mocking, spitting, flogging and murder.

Are you able to drink the cup, are you able to be baptized with the baptism I will be baptised? We say and sing and talk about Jesus in all sorts of ways which suggest victory, success, power to transcend and break through. Yet, this is not the way the path goes. The path is a downward one; one of cruel, meaningless, purposeless suffering. Abba, Father, remove this cup from me ...

To understand what Mark is saying about Jesus, we have to pay attention to the way Mark speaks of Jesus' suffering; what part it plays in the arc of his gospel. Because Mark is the first of the gospels, there is a freshness and distinctiveness about what Mark is saying about Jesus. He begins his urgent work with the brief words: *The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* And he ends it on that morning of the first day of the week at the tomb, with the women fleeing from the empty tomb, also, like them all going up to Jerusalem, in fear and amazement. For Mark this going up to Jerusalem is not an outing to trip the light fantastic to resurrection; the suffering will be real, visceral, calculated to erase body and soul and reputation. *Are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized?*

Some of you who use *With Love to the World* on a daily basis will have been dipping into the ancient wisdom literature of the Book of Job in the last couple of weeks. Although Job is set in the lectionary cycle we have not been reading it together. The Book of Job is a long and sustained exploration of the nature and meaning of human suffering. It's a long book, maybe 80% of it a long argument between Job and his three friends who are convinced he must have done something wrong to deserve the suffering he has undergone.

Firstly, the very affluent Job loses all his wealth and then his children. But when provoked by others in response to this stripping of all that was precious to him to abandon God, he resists: *'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'*

But then Job loses his health and is reduced to a kind of oozing pustulence. At this point his wife, embittered by all their loss asks Job, *'Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God and die.'*

There is a deep resonance between the suffering of Job and the suffering of Jesus. If we rush to the resurrection and its brightness, we fail to connect our own suffering with these stories of faith in the faith of what they go through. Maybe I would say of the faith of these two men, Job and Jesus, not that they had *enough* faith, but that theirs was a faith toward an image of God, an understanding of God. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus' suffering: *Although he was a*

*Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ...*

Paul in the letter to the Galatians writes that we are saved by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. It is a similar understanding to what the Hebrews writer says: *he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him*. Take up your cross and follow me. *For any who would save their lives would lose it, and those who lose their lives for my sake and the sake of the gospel will save it*. Curse God and die?

Our society predicates our human value on success, achievement, beauty, wealth; lots of successful, high-achieving progeny, lots of treasure. This was Job – everyone thought, blessed by God. Even Job: *the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away*. James and John believe Jesus is ascending to success: everyone wants be your long-lost friend. Grant us to sit ... We want to bask in your glory.

Another person's suffering should cause us to be silent. There are rarely easy answers. There is often no solution or quick fixes. They must travel through it. Who will we be; companions on the journey? Our calling is travel with another through the times they suffer, being hope for them when they feel there is no hope, being faithful toward an image of God who is full of mercy and lovingkindness, when they feel abandoned, maybe bitter.

The blessed ones Jesus speaks of in the beatitudes could be described as the ones who are considered to be society's discards. But these are the ones who can see the reign of God; who comprehend the nature of the reign of God and where it is that grace and mercy are to be found. As we seek to be the people of God, our calling is to bear witness that Christ may be seen in these places. So may we be midwives of the reign of God.

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