

Job 42. 1-7

Psalm 34. 1-8

Hebrews 7. 23-28

Mark 10. 46 - 52

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I understand, that I cannot understand.

Job has in many ways come to faith. Come to understand who God is in his vitals.

We who are still in the church are caught in between what you could describe as two tectonic plates; grinding up against each other. One plate is Christendom, where being Christian was the respectable label to identify oneself by – as Christian citizens. This belief had political connotations too. I love God and my country ...

Growing up in this climate, we were given lots of messages to hear and by which we might say we believe; we heard of God by the hearing of the ear. So many have heard by the hearing of the ear and have said if that's what the life of faith is about, I don't really want to be part of it. What does it matter if I subscribe to these things; what difference does it make to my life?

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Do you rant at God when things are hard? Do you permit yourself to do this? Christendom children were taught to be nice and compliant socially. And nice and compliant toward God too; otherwise God might get angry. How do you pray when you seem pressed in on every side; when you feel like you're drowning? When you're curled in a foetal position, longing to return to the salty warmth of the womb. *Can a man enter a second time ...?*

Job's understanding of God and himself is transformed – *I repent in dust and ashes.* Proud individualists that we are with our achievements, our successes all laid out behind us are affronted by the notion that we might repent in dust and ashes. But Job returns to the dust from which he is made ... ashes to ashes, dust to dust. And yet is reborn.

Father Richard Rohr talks of the change that changes everything. He talks of experiences in life which bring us undone, lay us low, knock our egos out and are doorways to transformation. These are not experiences that we choose or can control but they come to us and take us by the scruff of the neck and all our ego resources are brought to nothing. Richard talks of five big experiences in life which do this to us: suffering, death – being confronted with it in some way; near death for ourselves or the death of someone close to us, where the grief pulls out all our props; love – the experience of falling; God and eternity. There are others too.

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Our trouble is that we have so many props, so many things which can shield us from life's uncertainties – protections our ancestors lacked. And maybe to say the response that it was God's providence is a right one. But what do we say when too much suffering is at the malicious hands of others or the result of systems of oppression. Against which we should rail and do all we can to set things aright. But the experiences that come in disguise to us and ambush us and our inner resources seem powerless to resist. In these experiences are the invitation to transformation. To being reborn. Made whole in an utterly new way.

But it's not to be assumed that transformation will be the outcome. Because they are an invitation – and we are free to respond; to come to a new acceptance; a new humility and peace which passes understanding.

We know these people who have an inner light; who have travelled a difficult path and have somehow come through, They have both a lightness and yet also a gravitas about them. They shine with this inner light and to be with them is healing in itself and an invitation to also walk the path as they have. In the bearing they bear witness to something much greater, more profound than themselves. They are resurrected.

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out of so good, and so beloved, a hand.

There are no easy answers to these experiences for us. Job's three friends offered him plenty of easy explanations. But none satisfied – they simply rang in Job's ears, a clanging gong. Sometimes we feel the urge to speak words in the face of another's suffering; words we hope will be words of comfort or encouragement. But they're often hollow, or simply don't land or they sting because the skin of the soul is raw like Job's and they only exacerbate the bitterness. Sometimes a silent presence is all that is possible. Too often our words are more about our own discomfort; our own unresolved pain from previous life experience and we prattle in a haze of avoidance, rather than let the memory of our unresolved suffering near and are able to empathise with the suffering one.

In such difficult circumstances we are invited to witness another's suffering; bear witness to their suffering. I wonder if this witnessing in silence is somehow the nature of the witness that the gospel calls us to. We have seen a perversion of it in our own time; witness as a sort of berating of others in the way Job's friends berated him. Words! Words and more words! And no silence.

In each of the gospel accounts the women are witnesses to the death of Jesus. They stand and they watch. They are present to this one they have come to love. They wait and they watch and they report what they have seen. But they are present to the suffering of God in Christ in the cross.

The suffering of someone whose suffering cannot be lightened or lessened or taken away understandably elicits a terror in us. Everything in us, like in the male disciples, propels us from the scene.

Jesus asks the disciples to stay in the garden with him – watch and pray. As we walk the Good Friday walk each year one of the chants from Taize we sing as we walk from station is *Stay with me, pray with me, watch and pray!*

Mother Theresa, when asked about how she prays, said: when I pray I listen and God listens too. Like a kind of cosmic silence before the wonder and tragedy and mystery of the world. Not a berating God with words about what needs to be fixed but sitting in silence with God, knowing that God sees us with the divine eye, sees us as we are. And invites us to see God as God is.

I sought the Lord, and he answered me,  
and delivered me from all my fears.

**Look to him, and be radiant;  
so your faces shall never be ashamed.**

O taste and see that the Lord is good;  
**happy are those who take refuge in him.**