

2024- 07- 14 ... 6.30pm Evensong Sermon ... Revd Pippa White  
Job 4: 1; 4: 6 to end; Romans 15: 14 - 29

So when I was last preaching, I know I made a joke about looking forward to not having to preach on Jeremiah, but it feels like we've gone from the frying pan to the fire, going from Jeremiah to Job..!

But we press on, and we look for the good news of Christ in everything that is given to us. So! Let's talk about Job.

Job is, of course, the righteous and blameless man who is being tortured by the adversary, by the Devil, Satan, whatever we want to call him, because the adversary is convinced he can break Job, and make him turn against God. The Devil wants to prove that Job's faith is only when the sun is shining, that he can, and will, fold when things get bad.

So far in the story of Job, enemies have stolen all of his oxen and donkeys and killed his servants, sheep have been burnt up, camels gone, all of his children have died, and Job is now covered in sores. Poor old Job.

And to begin with, his friends do exactly the right thing. We're told in the previous chapter: **'Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temenite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes, and met together...to go and sympathise with him and comfort him'**.

So far, so good.

**'They sat on the ground with Job for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was'**.

Anyone who has gone through something awful, and has had friends and family come to stay with them to help you ride out a situation, will know how powerful that is.

Job's friends didn't think twice about giving up whatever they had in their diaries, to come support their friend, because all they cared about was that Job needed them. They sat with Job, in the silence, in the grief, in the heartbreak, just being there.

And if the story stopped there, they would have been the perfect friends. But, of course it doesn't. Because our reading tonight is the first of the infamous speeches by Job's friends. Eliphaz tells him: **'human beings are born to trouble just as sparks fly upwards'**. That's not really helpful, now is it, Eliphaz?

He goes on: **'happy is the one whom God reproves, therefore do not despise the discipline of the Almighty'** - that's like asking a child to thank you, after you've given them a slap on the bum for doing something wrong.

But he's not done just yet - he then goes on to explain how everything happens for a reason, that Job should **'hear, and know it for yourself'**. Anyone who, in the pure depths of their despair, has been told *'don't worry, everything happens for a reason, it's all part of God's plan'*, will know that all that does is A. make you angrier at God, and B. want to punch the person who said it.

And of course, the book of Job is filled with his friends trying to explain Job's suffering, why it's happening. But the problem is when you try to explain someone's suffering, is that it just feels like you're trying to explain it away.

**PTO**

So, you see, Job's friends were doing so well, until they opened their mouths. They were displaying compassion, until they wanted to make themselves feel better by giving the whole situation a solution, when it wasn't actually a solution that was needed, but love.

Let's take this thinking, and use it on our passage from Romans. Paul tells them: **'on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder...to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, in the priestly service of the gospel of God...'**

In other words, he's given them a rollicking for the things they've done wrong.

But let's apply our thoughts from Job onto this. If you guys are doing things wrong-  
- of course, not that you ever would, this is a pure hypothetical - but if the parishioners are going awry and misbehaving, you're up to things parishioners shouldn't be, what would you want from Chris and me, as people in the priestly service of the gospel of God?

Would you want us to send you some emails, something snippy and aggressive, or as Paul would say, **'rather boldly by way of reminder'**, to try to correct whatever you're doing? Or, perhaps, a complete dressing down, a tirade of words used against you, so that the clergy are now furious and the congregation are now ready to cry.

I mean we could, but perhaps there's something else we could do. We could try, like Job's friends when they were doing well, just coming alongside you. We could bite our tongues, and see what the root of the problem is, to see why you are all shoplifting, or vandalising someone's property, or all having extramarital affairs. We could quietly watch and wait to see where this misery is springing from, find out what is driving you to self-destruction, rather than bringing down our priestly wrath upon you.

To come alongside each other, when someone's in misery, or when something in someone's faith and character is going wrong, is one of the most Christ-like things we can do.

The commandment to love our neighbour isn't just for when it's easy, for when the sun's shining, for when you admire that person. It is to love them, as our God loves us. And I appreciate that that's daunting, that it can feel like a lot to do when life is rushing on as it always does. And it can be quite scary - often people don't reach out to those having a bad time, not because they don't care, but because they're so scared they'll say the wrong thing. They're scared that if they open their mouths, the wrong thing will come out, and they'll make the person more upset than they were to begin with.

To that, I ask, why say anything at all? Be like Job's friends, when they just sat with him in silence, with their compassion and their love saying far more than words could ever say.

As Christians, it is our duty and our decision, and I know this gets quoted a lot, but we are the people to **'Preach the gospel at all times, and to words if necessary'**.