Sermon for 30th in Ordinary Year B

Readings Job 42:1-6; Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 10:46-52

i

After suffering agonies of loss, pain and bereavement, Job is finally and overwhelmingly restored. The story has come full circle. Job’s faith has been thoroughly tested by Satan who wishes to show God that Job’s faith is insincere and that he is a fair-weather believer only, and that if Job loses his worldly blessings, he will turn against God.

However, Job’s humble acceptance of the mystery of God’s ways and his persistent faith in God’s ultimate justice gain their just reward.

In the last few weeks we have contrasted *Job* with the Wisdom tradition of *Proverbs*, and have noted how Wisdom tradition tends towards notions of having worked things out; how doing the right things, making the right choices leads inevitably to predictable, rationally explicable outcomes – whereas the *Job* tradition questions whether such theology is too simplistic and arrogant and offers in its place a more humble acceptance that God remains mysterious and beyond our rational understanding. Job has apparently done all the right things, and yet he suffers: This intentionally lampoons Wisdom literature’s view of religion. Job’s Comforters offer in turn the rational arguments of the Wisdom tradition and in each case are found wanting.

The message of Job is that faith is not a form of business deal in which you promise to believe and in return God promises to smooth life out for you. Rather, faith invites you to persevere with God even when you don’t understand what God’s up to – and even when it appears God is either absent, hostile, or defeated. This lesson in trusting God not just in the times of plenty, success and ease, but also in times of need, failure and catastrophe is a vital lesson in preparation for a crucified Saviour.

ii

Job acknowledges his Comforters were misguided, but he does not rejoice that he has been vindicated, but rather prays for his friends, for he recognises that whilst they were misguided, they were well-intentioned.

Hebrews 7 indicates that Jesus shares the same compassion as Job. Jesus, like Job in the OT story, has done nothing wrong, and yet suffers. Just as Job didn’t bear grudges against his unhelpful friends, neither does Jesus hold a grudge against his faint-hearted disciples or against any of his less than perfect followers of subsequent generations. As Job prayed for his friends, so Jesus prays eternally for us.

Sacrifices are mentioned in both the *Job* passage and the *Hebrews* passage. The important difference is that the sacrifices in *Job* are of bulls and rams and burnt offerings; in *Hebrews*, however, Jesus is both the perfect sacrifice and the eternal high priest. The expiation Jesus offers is of eternal and universal scope. Thus the age of bulls and rams and burnt offerings has come to an end. Now there is no need of any other priest appointed to replace Jesus, or any further sacrifice offered: “He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself” (v27).

iii

We get a very strong clue in our third reading what is required of us who wish to benefit from Christ’s prayers and sacrifice for us. The passage from Mark 10:46-52 recounts the story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus.

Jesus is about to pass through Jericho, a town well known at the time as a place where many priests lived when not on duty in Jerusalem at the temple. Yet it is not the priests, the professional experts in matters to do with the scriptures, who cry out to Jesus, “Son of David”. It is a blind beggar called Bartimaeus who addresses Jesus in such messianic terms.

So this is the first clue. To benefit from what Jesus has to offer, we have to call upon him and acknowledge him as the Messiah, or in the terms of the *Hebrews* passage, the Son of God. If we wish to call upon the name of Jesus, we must accept his authority over us. Jesus is not a merchant of miracles and dealer in pearls of wisdom. We cannot come to negotiate what we desire from him on our own terms, taking from him with one hand, and keeping him at a distance from our hearts with the other.

If we come to Jesus wishing for his help, we come as Bartimaeus did – with empty hands, bringing nothing with which to barter, just accepting Jesus’ authority over us as Lord and Saviour, and Son of God.

Also like Bartimaeus, we must acknowledge our true need.

Bartimaeus jumped to his feet upon hearing that Jesus would speak with him. It is with similar joy and haste that we should approach our Lord today.

Then Jesus asked blind Bartimaeus a strange question, perhaps a silly question in a way, because he asks what Bartimaeus wants. Surely isn’t it obvious? He’s a beggar. Beggars ask for money. Why is there any need to ask?

Yet Bartimaeus wants more than money and he has the faith to ask for what he truly needs – his sight.

In the context of the other two readings today, we may deduce that what Jesus requires of us is to be equally honest about what we need. We must acknowledge, as Job acknowledged, that we do not understand all mysteries, that we are often strained and stressed in our spiritual lives. That life’s tragedies can knock us down and we often grab too readily for baseless and specious explanations to our perennial question: ‘Why me?’

It was very difficult for Jesus to help the priests of Jericho that day he passed through because they did not perceive they were in need. They believed they could see spiritual truths clearly, that they understood what God required. But in reality, they were blind because they failed to see God’s Messiah when he walked down their street. It was only the physically blind, but spiritually perspicacious Bartimaeus who actually saw the truth about Jesus.

**Rev Dr Trevor Hoggard**

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