

## **Sundays between 23 and 29 October, 30<sup>th</sup> in Ordinary Time, Year B**

We are now in 'Ordinary Time' – that time of the Christian Year when (so we might believe) nothing extra-ordinary happens. Is it time for God's summer break? Or ours? In fact it's neither, of course.

Being in Ordinary Time means that we have both Continuous and Related Old Testament readings.

### **OT Continuous**

#### **Job 42: 1-6, 10-17**

We need to be attentive to the quotation marks in this passage. Job's speech includes quotations from the words of God to Job, followed in each case by Job's response.

Job's response to God is one of abashed humility. 'I had heard you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.' Could this be a way of describing a process of 'internalization', the movement by which something distant, at arms' length, becomes part of us, informing our inmost being in a way that objective knowledge cannot?

'Therefore I despise myself', says Job. A modern psychotherapist or counsellor might talk of Job's 'poor self-image'. But is that appropriate language for these circumstances. Part of the message of this complex and fascinating book is that in God we do not find an equal, we find One in whose presence we do well to be silent and humble. Reading this passage together with last week's (Job 38: 1-7, 34-41) we find that God's power is not used to dominate and subdue, but rather to nurture and protect.

Finally, as if in confirmation of that, Job's fortunes are restored. Ultimately Job is not a casualty of Satan's campaign of harassment. But others have been: his sons and daughters lose their lives back in chapter 1. Did Job still mourn the family he lost in chapter 1? Should we be troubled by their fate? Did his wife come back to him? Verse 13 suggests that she did – but in all this we must remember this is only a story, whose ending is akin to the fairytale 'lived happily ever after'. Like such tales, this story is not about depicting a real life sequence of events; rather it is an attempt to unravel a single sharply-focussed problem: the suffering of the innocent.

#### **Ps 34: 1-8 (19-22)**

This psalm affirms God's guardian care. Compare verse 7 with H&P 73, especially v4.

### **OT Related**

#### **Jer 31: 7-9**

Much of Jeremiah's book describes the uncomfortable and subversive message which God has commanded him to deliver, and the violent hostility with which it was received.

Jeremiah doesn't disguise his misery, so in two senses his reputation as 'a miserable old git' is justified: his message and his misery.

But here his mood changes; what he has prophesied has taken place; now is the moment for a more positive message of restoration. God's scattered people will return. Compare Ps 34: 19; here too is a declaration that the afflictions of the righteous will be eased.

God is both Judge and Saviour, demanding much of his people, but ultimately generous and welcoming. Jeremiah echoes the sentiments of Exilic Isaiah, for example in Isa 35.

### **Ps 126**

Does this need any introduction? The theme of restoration is again prominent, and the words very familiar to us. I can see why the triumph of harvest is associated with joy, but why the link, I wonder, between sowing and weeping?

### **Epistle Hebrews 7: 23-28**

The writer continues his treatment of priesthood, pointing now to the permanence of the risen Christ and his sacrifice (once for all), in contrast to the necessarily repeated sacrifices of the temple liturgy.

I confess to being perplexed by the way that Christian churches have resurrected the notion of priesthood, and why many Christians view the Eucharist in sacrificial terms, with Eucharists being celebrated and Masses said 'day after day'. It seems to fly in the face of this very clear and firm assertion that the sacrifice of Christ is indeed 'once for all'. It seems to say more about a human need for institutional structure, and for repetition, than about our need for Salvation.

There are answers to these puzzles, but they rest more in the realm of human psychology than of theology.

### **Gospel Mark 10: 46-52**

One of the fascinating things about the Gospels is the way in which the Evangelists connect their stories of Jesus. Here the company of disciples is on the road to Jerusalem. They are nervous and apprehensive. Bizarrely, a quarrel breaks out about which of them is the most important. And here, as Jesus and his friends move on through Jericho, is a story about a Blind Beggar who disturbs the peace! Why is this story situated here, after the muddles and rebukes of the previous episodes? It is about the blind seeing, the clamour to be heard.

Could it be that here Mark is setting out Jesus' stall: there's a world out there crying out for the gospel, and you're fretting about rank and position. It is a matter of concern that so much of the church's energy is dissipated in internal squabbles about the legitimacy of its various ministries.