

All Are Valued, All Are Loved

Job 42.1-6, 10-17, Mark 10.46-52

Our Gospel story today is a simple one and yet filled with meaning. Jesus has been teaching and predicting his death, approaching the cross with trust despite knowledge. Over the last few weeks, we have been following Jesus and his disciples from Nazareth to Jerusalem.

Let's see where they are going. Jesus is going up to Jerusalem. Up can mean somewhere higher. We also say up north and down south because we are used to reading maps. We say up country when we mean somewhere in the interior. However, here up means the topography. Jerusalem is on a higher location.

They have taken the eastern route which crosses the Jordan south of the Sea of Galilee, continues south and then turns back west before the Dead Sea to pass through Jericho to Jerusalem. They are now on the last part of this journey.

There was a crowd with Jesus and his disciples. They were going past Bartimeus, a blind beggar, sitting by the roadside. That is what blind beggars did. Bartimeus calls out to Jesus and the crowd tries to hush him. His interests are not theirs. That is, until Jesus answers and calls for Bartimeus to come to him. Then the crowd is on his side. Perhaps they sense that some wonder is about to be performed.

Jesus asks, as he often does, "What do you want from me?" Bartimeus, trusting Jesus, says, "My teacher, let me see again." Immediately we know that Bartimeus was not born blind. He knows what it is to see. That is what he wants to regain and what he believes Jesus can do for him.

For his faith, he is healed and may now go his own way or follow Jesus in gratitude. What does he choose to do? [...]

He follows and perhaps comes to Jerusalem, perhaps even comes to the cross. Perhaps he is still in Jerusalem for the resurrection. We do not know, but we do know that through faith, he was healed by Jesus, and this experience changed his life.

We often think that the New Testament is where we learn most about God's love, but the Old Testament has many passages that speak to our modern world in ways that we can relate to.

Today we hear the conclusion of the story of Job. It may seem as though the end of the book of Job brings all to a happy ending and indeed there is much happiness in

it. However, we would be mistaken if we think that this ending is the whole point of the story. After all, apart from an increase in material riches it is not too different from the beginning, and we also know that despite the conventions of story-telling, not every story has a conventional happy ending.

Job began as a rich man. He was blameless, upright and “the greatest of all the people of the east”. He lost everything but eventually became twice as rich as when he started. Why take 42 chapters to get back to almost the same place? At least part of the answer must be that the people in this story are not in the same place, or they are not the same people that they were, or perhaps both.

Let’s look at Job’s family. If we assume that he still has the same wife, and we are not told that it was otherwise, she also lost 10 children and later bore 10 more. Love, and loss, and love. And perhaps a loss of certainty concerning the future of these later 10 children. Life can apparently change in an instant.

I wonder what she thought about the restoration of wealth and the birth of more children. Did she feel safe and blessed, or fearful of what might happen again?

What about Job’s children? Did they feel loved in their own right, or for the sake of those who had been lost?

In the beginning there were 7 sons and 3 daughters. We don’t know much more about them. They were apparently adults. We hear that “His sons used to go and hold feasts in one another’s houses in turn; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and to drink wine with them.” (Job 1.4) So, they were a close family, affluent and sociable.

Seven sons. Seven is a number of completion. Seven sons is a good number, all that is needed, or so Job originally thought. He started with seven sons and in the end he again had seven sons. We know no more about them.

Three is also a spiritually significant number and many triads appear in the Bible. Like seven, it resonates with completeness but also with imagination, creativity and beauty. We know a little about Job’s first three daughters, but a little more about his second three daughters and this is unusual and significant.

Before we talk about them, we should look at the inclusive language in the Book of Job. I acknowledge that this is a specialist interest and perhaps not fascinating to everyone, but it underlines the expression of God’s inclusive love, something we can find in the Old Testament and the New Testament if we look.

Chapter 14 of Job talks about the human condition and has some interesting words to describe people : *born of woman, one (e.g. such a one, no one), who, they, them, mortals, humans, their children.*

When we translate the Bible, the Hebrew or Greek is unchanging. It is a snapshot of those languages at the time or times it was written.

The English translation, on the other hand, does change, and if we are to preserve the accuracy of translation, we often need to modernise the translation where our language has changed.

This happens with hymns as well. Together in Song is a somewhat more inclusive hymn book than Mission Praise.

Some change/s

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today - **Sons of men** and angels say, becomes in TiS, Let the whole creation say.

Good Christian men rejoice becomes **Good Christians all** rejoice.

Not changed.

Battle Hymn of the Republic - He is sifting out the hearts of **men** before his judgment seat. As he died to make **men** holy, let us live to make **men** free.

Now Thank We All Our God - Who, from our **mothers'** arms.

When we modernise, we walk a fine line between truth and tradition.

Job 14.1 begins "Man that is born of woman" or similar. Some more modern translations say *Humanity born of* ,,,, *Anyone born of* ..., *Persons born of* ..., or *Human beings born of* ...

Some of these may sound awkward to us, while others sound more natural. This is not just in Job, but throughout the Bible.

Man or **mankind** can mean a man, all men or all people. Mankind can never mean just all women. There must be at least one man in the group, all men or all people (men and women). This varying meaning held in a single word is present in other languages as well as English. These words are used less often in our everyday language as we now use less gendered language and speak of people, humanity, humankind, or similar. This change was to make it clear that women were included as well as men. This was a good change, but we are now even less likely to consider the inclusion or presence of women when we hear words like "mankind".

Beyond inclusive words, there are also inclusive actions. Jesus urged the inclusion of the poor and vulnerable, outsiders, children, and all who were not thought of as being equally important.

Let's come back to Job's second 3 daughters. I invite you to read verses 14 and 15 of our reading from chapter 42.

¹⁴ *He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch.*

¹⁵ *In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers.*

They are beautiful. This is a sign of blessing for Job.

Their beauty is a blessing for Job, something to be admired and also a practical asset when seeking husbands, but I think that the most significant information is bracketed around this.

They are also named, honoured and treated equally, not just equally with one another, but equally with their brothers in terms of inheritance.

We do not hear these things about his first 3 daughters. Is that significant? I don't know. You can decide what you think.

Being told their names is very unusual when we do not subsequently learn any more of their later lives. The meanings of these names echo beautiful, valuable or desirable things. You can look them up if you wish.

But there's more. Job breaks with custom and gives them an equal inheritance with their brothers. This would make them rich.

These young women were described positively, named, honoured and treated equally. In essence, they were treated, and equipped for life, in the same way as Job's sons.

The character of Job gives us a small glimpse of a life lived with total trust in God.

Later, through Jesus, many were and are encouraged in this sort of faith and trust, knowing the perfect love that casts out fear, no matter what the circumstances.

May we find this in our own lives and encourage it in the lives of others. Amen.