

NOT TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE is the theme for today and I have chosen to focus on the reading from the book of Job.

This book is the **first of the poetic books of the Old Testament**. It reads like a play and deals with an old and common questions.

Why do people suffer?

Or Is God really in control of the joys and misfortunes of our lives?

Job is generally thought to be the oldest book in the Bible. So generally its themes and ideas are revisited elsewhere in the Bible and help us to renew our perspective on these same questions.

In summary, the story of Job opens with a scene in heaven where Satan, the devil, comes to accuse Job before God. Job has 'everything'—health, wealth, respect, and a healthy family, as well as his service and deep love for God. Satan challenges The Lord regarding Job's love and faith, and says it will soon fade away if God removes the blessings that he has given him. And so, with God's consent, Job's sufferings begin; they include every tragedy imaginable. Eventually he loses everything, all is lost, including his precious family. It is a long book, 42 chapters, so my summary of course leaves a lot to be desired. As Job suffers and his friends try to determine why that is their reasoning concludes, that Job has some unconfessed sin, and God is punishing him. (Ch.4). Finally, God speaks, in chapter 38, the chosen reading for today, and rebukes them all for their lack of understanding. Ultimately, the distressed, but faithful Job has his fortunes restored two-fold.

So to read today's passage from the book,

Job 38:1-7, 34-41

From out of a storm, the LORD said to Job:

² **Why do you talk so much when you know so little?**

³ Now get ready to face me!

Can you answer the questions I ask?

⁴ How did I lay the foundation for the earth?

Were you there?

⁵ Doubtless you know who decided its length and width.

⁶ What supports the foundation?

Who placed the cornerstone, while morning stars sang, and angels rejoiced?

³⁴ Can you order the clouds to send a downpour, or will lightning flash at your command?

³⁶ Did you teach birds to know that rain or floods are on their way?

³⁷ Can you count the clouds or pour out their water ³⁸ on the dry, lumpy soil?

³⁹ When lions are hungry, do you help them hunt?

⁴⁰ Do you send an animal into their den?

⁴¹ And when starving young ravens cry out to me for food, do you satisfy their hunger?

In this passage, is the Lord challenging Job here with concerns about his own powerlessness, his inability to control the forces of nature, to understand the mysteries of creation or, in comparison, God's wisdom and power, maybe to recognise his own arrogance or foolishness? The second verse of this chapter 38 stood out to me,

² **Why do you talk so much when you know so little?.**

Well, for me, this is always a concern - who am I to talk, especially to preach? To risk saying too much and/or missing the most important point. Getting older, it is true, that, the more

you know, the more you feel you need to know, to be authoritative on any subject. That includes seeking to illuminate the scriptures.

Especially in this CoVid, zoom service, setting with a stay-at-home audience, there can be few direct questions or little discussion to find a common view or to find the opportunity for someone present in the congregation to suggest some pearls of wisdom.

Proverbs 14:3 says,

"Proud fools talk too much; the words of the wise protect them."

So perhaps there needs to be some discussion or feedback at some point to add to our communal wisdom and faith and save me from being a proud fool.

About talking too much. We've all been caught off guard by people who talk too much, feeling trapped, not really interested, no opportunity for your point of view. (Peter says "have a look in the appendix to see if yours is one of the names mentioned") Do we notice the times when we overwhelm, bore, exclude, others with our speech?

One thing that always strikes me about Jesus is how often he remained silent, particularly whilst under attack, not attempting to defend himself! Throughout the gospels, there's a sense that Jesus never spoke more than he needed to. He always spoke from a place of practical wisdom and was a master practitioner of the economy of words.

Jesus practiced what the Eastern traditions call 'skilful-means', a wisdom that was and is a practical best and effective way to communicate. I suspect that Jesus also knew how to listen deeply and of course He inherently knew exactly where people were at. He read their minds and tapped into their deepest concerns. He has Son of God advantages but we seek to serve him - **Just like Jesus.**

(For those of you who might be still thinking, "Do I talk too much?" , there will be a spiritual guide, posted as a resource on this web site.)

'Why do you talk so much when you know so little?' Job 38:2

To return to the passage, we must note that it is not just about talking too much but talking in ignorance. We all know the old adage

A wise old owl sat on an oak
The more he saw the less he spoke,
The less he spoke the more he heard
Why can't we be like that old bird.

We know that we live in extraordinary times especially with the pandemic, but also confronted with certain climate change, increasing displacement of people, growing refugee numbers, environmental degradation, growing inequality and much more. Yet we also live in a time of rampant misinformation.

It is ironic because we have the technological means to deliver more broadly the truth or accurate information. To serve the world with education and information for good.

Why, and why is this of concern to Christians or people of faith? Is serving the world in this way of truth telling our core-business?

In responding to this thought your minds might turn to issues of power or power sharing, of privilege and serving the poor. **Our Christian message is true and truth-telling is our core business**, but perhaps easily corrupted. Sometimes the more bizarre the message the more attention it generates?

Is misinformation a product of the rich and powerful? Is it a consequence of ignorance, or general distrust, disproportionate individualism, or simply free speech? Is it a product of fair media? Or is giving equal air-time of screen time, the same as lending oxygen to the fire of propaganda or self-seeking attention?

The next verse in the reading from Job reminds us all whom we serve., The Lord says, **'Now get ready to face me!'**

Our 'talk', particularly our uninformed opinions are not innocent, not without consequences, not just idle, but potentially dangerous. We can all think of examples.

God speaks here not just of responsibility, but accountability. We are answerable for the consequence, both the intended and unintended consequences, of misleading people. As God's servants we are by definition subject to the master.

'Now get ready to face me!'

Can you answer the questions I ask? Says the Lord

This verse implies, or begs the question,

What power, authority do **you** really have? Demonstrated in what way? The Lord turns Job's attention to creation, to the immeasurable greatness and power of Gods handiwork.

'Can you answer the questions I ask?

⁴ How did I lay the foundation for the earth?

Were you there?

Where you there in the first place?'

Did you experience firsthand the situation? What was there to see plainly? Are we examining something that is tangible and evident? First-hand knowledge, maybe a good guide in any situation where opinions may dominate over experience and tested knowledge.

But then there is the unseen world about us,

Who placed the cornerstone, while morning stars sang, and angels rejoiced?

Angels, then the instincts of birds these wonderful mysteries of God's creation.

The consequence of true honesty is sometimes to say, "No I wasn't there, I don't know. In that way are we compelled to talk less.

This isn't anti-learning, maybe a change of emphasis. If we listen more we learn more and assess better who we can trust. Peter Skelton has a favourite true story of John Francis, a man who in 1971, vowed silence to listen more, and who eventually broke silence after 17 years. Extreme, yes, but he claimed that in not speaking and listening well he learnt a great deal. (15 minute [TED talk here](#))

Another interesting aspect to this Job passage for me is how it might feed into another aspect of faith-filled but very non-mainstream views of the natural order of the earth. Is the earth flat? You might assume that obviously, not. In the depths of history challenging the flat earth view might have landed you imprisoned and tortured, we think of Galileo.

Galileo in conflict with the prevailing view of the Church and State sort to establish what we might regard as a given, that the earth revolves around the sun. He suffered for his troubles. Maybe the church of the 17th Century drew evidence from today's passage from Job.

⁴ How did I lay the foundation for the earth?

Were you there?

⁵ Doubtless you know who decided its length and width.

⁶ What supports the foundation?

Who placed the cornerstone,

I won't digress too much but many people today still believe the earth to flat, the moon landing a hoax and a numerous suite of other conspiracy theories about many topics including the pandemic. You have heard them I am sure. Do we have a responsibility here to engage in these conversations, and how?

If you think, 'Yes', the truth matters, this is part of my Christian service, but I need help to navigate these difficult conversations. There are some good resources available to us. From our Christian perspective, we would certainly advocate a prayerful exercise of the Fruit of the Spirit;- Love, patience, long-suffering (equating to tolerance) and respect whilst questioning the logic of the other.

Others have chosen to guide our response recognising that the consequences of misbelieve can be serious, not just for society at large but more particularly for the individual who is misguided and may be trapped in a culture which is ultimately isolating, powerful and damaging.

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ABC Radio National discussion with Lee - [Listen here](#) from [Late Night Live](#)

it seems pretty obvious to McIntyre that the people he meets there have all undergone some sort of deep psychological trauma, which means that regular logic simply will not work to change their minds.

This viewpoint would suggest that part of our pastoral care is to know best how to challenge erroneous or damaging views of the world.

I would like to conclude with an attempt to refer to a few principles of service or servanthood I see from all the readings for today.

A few statements

- Sharing the truth matters, it is part of our responsibility
- The created world demonstrates that it is God who rules the universe - His Power and His glory.
- Ultimately God determines the course of His - story, history.

- We have incomplete understanding of the purpose of life's events and the distinction between blessings, punishment, natural and imposed consequences of our own behaviour and the intervention of God.
- We need to be cautious, compassionate and wise in dividing fact from fiction, reinforcing the need for the intervention of God's Spirit.
- Suffering is part of the equation of Godly service and obedience (one of the main messages of the Mark passage)
- God knows! 'Some things are not ours to know, they are simply in God's powerful hands. In today's gospel reading, Jesus reminded John & James the sons of Zebedee, I can't tell you who will sit at my left or my right in heaven - that is God's business!

As we continue to explore God's business may we absorb that which is necessary to Love and serve him faithfully no matter the trials we face - the message of Job and the teaching of Jesus.