

Good morning everyone,

The readings for this coming Third Sunday after Trinity raise the issue of suffering, evil, misfortune which are part of life as it is. We are reminded that God is in control, even of the seemingly uncontrollable forces of nature and the creation. We are urged to be resilient, to have faith rather than fear. God is with us and will bring us through the turmoil. It is a difficult message for many people to grasp and it is the most used excuse for lack of belief in God, and particularly a loving God. But try imagining a world or universe without any such troubles. You will soon realise that an alternative reality would require us to be something less than human and free. In Jesus, God has experienced all that human life involves including suffering and death. That alone is enough for us to know that God is with us, come what may.

Job 38: 1 – 11

We rarely meet Job in our Sunday readings, so what follows is the briefest attempt at a summary of the whole book, without which, today's reading would make little sense. The book of Job deals with the ancient problem of suffering, and particularly suffering in the life of someone who is 'good,' 'upright' and 'faithful.' The work is an example of wisdom literature, a poetic literary creation, not a report of a literal debate among historical human characters, but certainly reflecting a common debate in the ancient world as in the present. The sick, disaster-struck and bereaved Job ends a long debate with his friends with a conviction that he has done nothing to deserve the suffering that has been inflicted on him and he makes a formal protest to God of his innocence. Today's reading is the beginning of God's response to Job. Job's mortal limitations and assumptions become clear to him, and he comes to understand the nearness and mystery of the all-powerful God. The experience brings him to repent of his foolish protest 'in dust and ashes.' Job's confession and fresh insight leads to his fortunes being restored to him many times over.

2 Corinthians 6: 1 – 13

An appeal to the wayward Corinthians to be reconciled to God. Paul and his companions are 'ambassadors for Christ' (5: 20) and he commends their ministry to his readers by listing their various experiences and attributes including suffering, hardship, patience, integrity and love. He points to the stark contrast between the way people judge him and the reality of his example.

What commends the gospel will not be the status or social standing of Christians but their example of resilience, integrity, and love, accompanied by an inner peace in the midst of the storms of life.

Mark 4: 35 – 41

An account of Jesus apparently performing a 'nature miracle.' He and his disciples are crossing the Sea of Galilee when storm suddenly erupts. The disciples are frightened, but Jesus is asleep. As there were fisherman among them who would have knowledge and experience of the lake and its habits, their fear seems rather surprising.

Whatever really happened, we must consider what the story means. In the Hebrew Bible the sea, as well as being a huge body of water, is a symbol of power and fear. It is

sometimes associated with evil (e.g. see Isaiah 51 and Daniel 7). The sea could be destructive to life. But God is shown as having power over the sea (e.g. see Psalm 107).

In tradition, the boat in the story is a symbol of the early Church, battered and fearful amid turbulent times, yet consoled, encouraged and protected by the presence of the risen Christ. For us too as we read this story, there is the assurance that Christ, the risen Lord, comes to us in our hour of need, our darkness. He calms the storms and troubled waters of our lives. This is the heart of the message that Mark is trying to convey. As Jesus taught truth through parables, here we have a truth *about* Jesus in the form of a parable.

A prayer for the day:

God of power and might, when we cry out to you in the storms of life, reassure us that you care and that you are with us. By your grace may our faith remain calm and peaceful, and may it deepen in every trial we encounter. Keep us trusting that the waves obey you and that at your command the powers of evil cannot harm us. Stay with us through your Son and our Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord, today and always. Amen.

Blessings for your Sunday worship and the coming week.

Love and prayers,

John