

Worship at Home for Sunday 27 October 2024

Welcome to this act of worship at home. Let us begin with a deep sense of gratitude to our Lord God for our lives, for the good things we enjoy even when times are challenging, for companionship through the church family, for Christian love, for the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We have not earned these things but our Lord has given them us. Let us open our hearts to God and say: "Almighty God, as we pray to you, help us to listen to you; to hear what you have to say to us through this act of worship. May we be encouraged and receive the strength and desire to do your work and help to fulfil your purpose. **Amen**"

Reading

The lectionary for today includes a reading about how Job and God are finally reconciled after the long story of how a good man is overwhelmed by calamity and suffers greatly, all of which challenges his faith but, despite the narrow-mindedness of his friends, God steps in and Job is restored to twice the man than he was before. The reading is from Job, chapter 42, verses 1-6 and 10-17: *'Then Job replied to the Lord: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."*

After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring. The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so Job died, an old man and full of years.'

Our hymn is "God has spoken - by his prophets" and can be found at 157 in Singing the Faith:

1. God has spoken-by his prophets,
spoken his unchanging word;
each from age to age proclaiming
God the one, the righteous Lord;
in the world's despair and turmoil
one firm anchor still holds fast:
God is king, his throne eternal,
God the first and God the last.

2. God has spoken-by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son;
brightness of the Father's glory,
with the Father ever one:

spoken by the Word incarnate,
God, before all time began,
light of light, to earth descending,
Man, revealing God to man.

3. God is speaking-by his Spirit
speaking to our hearts again;
in the age-long word expounding
God's own message, now as then.
Through the rise and fall of nations
one sure faith is standing fast:
God abides, his word unchanging,
God the first and God the last

A Reflection on our reading as Job might have told it:

"I expect you have heard a lot about me. I am the man who had it all and I don't mind telling you that I was a good man – a very good man. I believed in God and was diligent in my faith. I went to synagogue. I did all the right things. I looked after my family and my servants. Things were good. Then one day it all started to go wrong. First my animals were slaughtered and my servants were murdered; my children were killed in a freak accident while they were feasting at my brother's

house. Then I got sick and my body was covered in sores; it was excruciating. My wife told me I should give up on God; then my friends started to have a go at me, saying that I must have done something wrong, and so it went on and on – my friends became my tormentors, levelling false accusations at me. I declared myself to me the innocent victim of God but God would not answer me. Why did God abandon me?

Being the head of a once successful family, I didn't think a young man could say much to help me but Elihu did. Do you know him? He is the son of Barakel the Buzite, of another great family, the Ram's. He had a real go at me because he said all I was doing was trying to justify myself before God. He put me in my place and, basically, told me that I was just being self centred in my pity for myself – he said that God is so great that man is nothing in comparison, so why should God care about me? I had grown too big for my boots! While all this was going on, there was a storm raging all around us and, suddenly, God spoke to me out of the storm. I realised that, yes, God is almighty, far and away above humanity but he is also near us. He does hear us when we call out to him and he really cares about us. I realised that God wanted me to see more of him than I have ever noticed before - I don't mean seeing him face-to-face, of course, but seeing him in the sense that I knew him. God was seeking a deeper relationship with me; I see that now. It's ironic really that I learnt more of God in the midst of my pain than when my life was going well. I wasn't open to God until I found myself in a desperate place. Now, I am not saying that we should all long to suffer just so we can learn more about God - that would be perverse. But perhaps we need to learn how to 'suffer well' if you like. When life is hard, painful, almost intolerable even, it is easy to turn our backs on God, or, at best, to rely on the God we thought we knew. But that is where I went wrong. I thought my life could be perfect if I was a good man but that's not the case. We all face problems at times in our lives but I now know that we can all use adversity as a stepping stone to find a deeper relationship with God. What I had failed to do was recognise God as "other" – God has his own ways, his own reasons. And I discovered that God, our God, chooses to deal with humanity and yet is not a human. He is not made from human hands, but is the creator of the universe who knows and sees far beyond what we can see. He holds everything securely, even in his "otherness". It was only when I saw who God really was that I knew I would never understand. But that didn't matter because God understands, and God is God; no matter what. God cannot be made in our image, but the more we let God be God, the more like him we will surely become.

Of course, you have the benefit of knowing who came after me and all those wise and amazing prophets. Jesus showed you the true nature of God revealed on the cross. If you find yourselves in darkness, that can lead you deeper into the heart of our suffering God – a God who knows what it is to suffer with us; a God who yearns to reveal more of himself to us while holding us in his comforting arms. My friends, you have a Christian journey to follow and that may not be an easy one but, if you allow God in, your relationship with him will deepen. When you face adversity, you may discover that God is not the God you perceived; perhaps not even the God you hope for. But he is, and will be, the God that you need for that moment. He is the God who holds the universe in his hands and the God who holds us; the God who can see far beyond what we can see or understand; the God who knows how much closer to him we can become if we choose to look closer at him. So, open your eyes just as I did to see my most wonderful and awesome God, who was there for me. My friends, God is there for you too." **Amen**

Let us pray: Almighty God, thank you for drawing us to you, stretching out your arms in welcome and embracing us in love. Thank you for being so special, impossible to understand, so great and, yet, so approachable and close to us. Loving God, we pray for those who are blind or partially sighted, and for those who are spiritually or emotionally blind. We pray for the opening of eyes to see your way and for faith to trust you through good and ill. May we all see you more clearly and love you more dearly. And finally, loving God, we pray that you will bless and keep us safe with you, whatever we may encounter on life's journey. For we pray in the name of your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Paula Littlewood