

**Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
23rd March 2021**

READINGS

*"I shout for help, God, and get nothing, no answer!
I stand to face you in protest, and you give me a blank stare!
You've turned into my tormenter—
you slap me around, knock me about.
You raised me up so I was riding high
and then dropped me, and I crashed.
I know you're determined to kill me,
to put me six feet under.
"What did I do to deserve this?
Did I ever hit anyone who was calling for help?
Haven't I wept for those who live a hard life,
been heartsick over the lot of the poor?
But where did it get me?
I expected good but evil showed up.
I looked for light but darkness fell.
My stomach's in a constant churning, never settles down.
Each day confronts me with more suffering.
I walk under a black cloud. The sun is gone.*

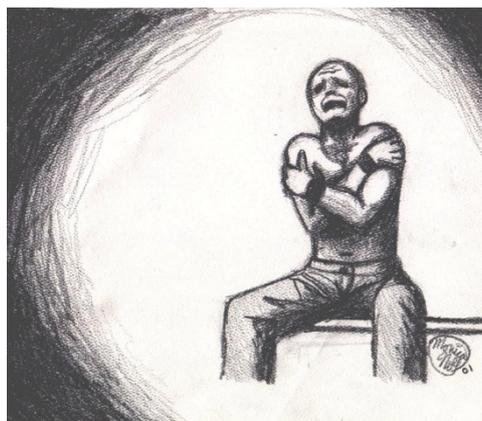
Job 30:20-28 (The Message Translation)

Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?"

Jesus said, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world's Light."

He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man's eyes, and said, "Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam" (Siloam means "Sent"). The man went and washed—and saw.

John 9 :1-7 (The Message Translation)



REFLECTION

A friend and I went out exploring in the Mourne mountains near where I grew up in Northern Ireland. We had walked for a few hours when the fog descended, and you could barely see five feet in front of you. We plodded on, certain that we knew where we were going, until about an hour or so later, when my friend noted a pile of rocks that looked really familiar, and it quickly dawned on us that we had just walked in a complete circle. So it was out with the map and the compass, in order to find our way home and to safety. That day I learned the importance of having the right equipment and I have never gone walking in the hills without a compass and map, for it is easy to become disorientated and lose your way when the conditions are not favourable.

And I think it is just as easy to become disorientated and lost in a spiritual wilderness.

So often it is our difficulties in life, the terrible things that happen to us or to our loved ones that leads us into that place where we feel heaven is silent, where we feel so distant from God, and from other people. A spiritual wilderness, where doubt and questions assail us and, like Job, we cry out Why? Why has this happened to me? Why is God so silent?

That certainly sounds out in these long months of the pandemic. Why has this happened? Why have so many suffered? Trying to find an answer to those question can be like trying to find your way off a foggy mountainside without a compass.

The disciples ask Jesus the same question New Testament reading this week – the story of the blind man. “Why is this man blind?”, they ask. There must be a reason, is it punishment for some wrong that he or his family did at some point? Why?

But Jesus response is entirely different! He asks an entirely different question. Jesus asks, “What will you do about the blind man?”

Which question helps the blind man most? The one that answers the reason for his blindness, or the one that leads to him seeing again?

So often knowing the answer to the why question doesn't really help. Knowing the answer doesn't make it any easier to bear, knowing the answer doesn't lead us out of the spiritual wilderness.

Jesus is more interested in consequences than causes. He asks of us ‘What are you going to do with what has happened to you?’. And that question is like a compass in a fog. Because it gives us a direction, it shows us that life moves forward, it shows us that there is a tomorrow, that there is more ahead of us, that God does still loves us, and will love us tomorrow too.

Hans Kung, the Swiss Catholic theologian and priest writes:

“Jesus did not give a philosophical or theological justification ... This is not a God at an ominous, transcendent distance, but close in incomprehensible goodness; He is a God who does not make empty promises about the hereafter or minimize the present darkness, futility and meaninglessness. Instead in darkness, futility and meaninglessness, He invites us to a venture of hope.”

In your wilderness I can give you no answer to your ‘why?’ Most likely no one can.

But I can promise you this, there is a future. The sunrise will still come in the morning. The new day will still begin. God will still love you, still hold you and still invite you to venture forward in hope.

PRAYER

God,
Loving parent to your people;
God,
Who suffers on the cross;
God,
Whose response to pain and death is resurrection;
God,
Who is light in the darkness
Hear our cry,
Hear our prayer -
Bring your comfort
Bring your peace.

And Lord, when our vision grows dull,
And our hearts are weary,
Lord, when our will is weak,
And our lives seems lost in pain;
Open our eyes to your glory,
Renew our hearts with your love,
Strengthen our will with your purpose,
Flood our lives with your light,
And make us ever more aware of you.

In Jesus name we pray,
Amen.

