

Saturday 26

Filled with Joy

3rd October 2020

The writer of the Book of Job was wrestling with the ancient problem of evil, which is thoroughly mixed in with our human life. Why do innocent children get sick and die? Why do we die? Why are people so cruel? Why do terrible accidents happen? Why suffering? He gives several possible explanations as to what it is all about.

We just heard the ending: the story seems to finish by returning to the view that God rewards the good and punishes the bad. But this is the view that it rejected from the beginning!

Besides, it seems callously to ignore the fact that a new wife and children do not simply replace ones that died. We are left wondering. There is more to the book's simple ending than at first appears.

In Job's final speech – before his family was restored –

Did he mean: *I was wrong: I repent in dust and ashes?*

Or: *I **reject** dust and ashes, as the symbols of mourning? I'm ok now.*

Or was it: *I withdraw my words, and am content to **be** dust and ashes, a human being? And so on...*

The book brilliantly tells us that, in the universe God has made, there is no simple answer. A deeper explanation is always possible.

We are told that we must always strive to look for the 'bigger picture' or context, for God is always deeper, and conversing with God will always deepen our understanding.

Among what seems like chaos, God is there in the midst of it.

Could it be that today's reading from Luke's gospel gives us something very close to an answer to Job's great question?

In this simple story, Jesus has sent out 72 of his followers around the villages of Galilee to tell his Good News: that God, our loving parent, knows and intensely loves **each** of us, **every** person. We might not know ourselves very well, but God understands and protects us.

When we can begin to see this, not just the words on a page, but in our deepest heart, this brings us **enormous joy**.

Luke says that this is done by the Holy Spirit: God **present** in us.

Luke tells us several times that Jesus was *filled* with this Holy Spirit:

when he was baptised;
when the Spirit led him out into his desert retreat,
and when he came back and began preaching in Galilee.

Here again, in this chapter 10, when his 72 friends return from sharing the Good News, the Spirit again fills him with joy.

He tells the apprentice preachers about an insight he has had: now that the Good News has been released into the world, Satan has fallen like lightning from heaven. The power of evil, which Jesus calls Satan, has been overcome once and for all.

Just one chapter earlier, Jesus' disciples weren't able to cast out an individual demon from a sick boy, but now, as they preach the Good News of God's reign, it is happening.

In another story told by Mark, Matthew and Luke, Jesus describes this great conflict with Evil as overcoming the 'strong man' so as to move into and take possession of his house.

Since Jesus gave us the Good News, and confirmed it by his death and resurrection, the world has turned a corner. Yes, natural disasters, human carelessness, and human perversity are all still at work in our life, but evil has been **conquered**: the answer for Job and us is that we are loved and held by God, who is the beginning and the end of the story.

May I ask a question: Have **we** ever been *filled* with joy? We can be.

Each of us shares the work of those 72; every day, we are invited to give Jesus' Good News to ourselves and to someone else.

When we realise the truth that God knows us... that our names are written in heaven, we **will** be filled with joy.