

[Job 7:1-7, Psalm 147, 1 Corinthians 9:16-23, Mark 1:29-39]

Job **had a hard life**. He's the main character in the mythical story from which our first reading came. His mythical story tells of a man who once had everything, but then lost it all, not through his own fault but through accident, bad weather and enemy attack.

The story says that it **God** allowed him to suffer all this tragedy: losing his family, wealth and health to test his faith! We heard him, in the middle of his misery, crying out that life is a drag; drudgery; slavery; brief as a breath. Something you long to see the end of.

The Book of Job is a myth, but it describes real human experience; our experience. There are times when we've all been there. Today, 7th of February, it is all too painfully true for millions of people around the world. Think of the **Uighurs** in those re-education camps in China: forced to learn propaganda by heart; punished if they fail to learn; tortured; raped. Think of the millions living in wretched **refugee camps**, lacking food and shelter.

But there is one thing that can change these pictures, turn them completely around. When a person truly hears the **Word of God**, the Good News that God's Reign has begun and is right here, in our heart, then they can rise above their misery, even if it is still there physically. It is that Word that today's gospel is about.

Mark describes **an intimate scene**, where **Jesus heals the** unnamed mother-in-law of his friend Simon Peter. She is sick with fever. Mark chooses his words carefully, and uses three important ones here:

Jesus takes the sick woman by the hand. He **touches** her, breaking the custom of that culture.

Some years ago our community in Auckland helped a Muslim refugee who had been wrongly put in prison. After three years he was released and his wife and children came from Malaysia to be with him. It was a wonderful moment to see them reunited. But when I first met Ahmed's wonderful wife, I remembered just in time **not** to offer to shake hands with her.

Muslim women and men do not shake hands, do not touch, even on such occasions.

But Jesus broke through such prohibitions. He liberates us.

Another important word Mark uses is 'he helped her to **stand up**'. Mark was writing for his own community, who were being persecuted. This simple word would remind them at once that Jesus

stood up, was resurrected, after he had been murdered. He stood up again. Same word. The listeners would have been given great hope; so are we.

The third word is: she **served** them. This woman became Jesus' follower, his disciple. All the women in Mark's community, and every woman reading the gospel ever since, can know that Jesus sees women and men as his followers, **completely equal**.

After this private scene, healing a sick woman and having a meal, there is no rest for Jesus. Word gets out and the **whole town** comes to their door, asking for **help. Everyone; for like Job we all suffer**, and need healing.

What is interesting here: **Jesus heals many, but not all**.

Jesus does not – cannot - cure all the physical problems of Capernaum or any place. He does not cure old age, or poverty, or the cruel oppression of the Roman army on the farmer and fishermen of Palestine. Nor does he cure all our sufferings: but his **Word** gives us a much greater healing: his Good News shows us the deep meaning of our life itself: that we are children of the infinite God; destined to live, forever, in God's love. The Good News.

Early before dawn, Jesus runs away. He goes off to pray, as he prayed in the desert for 40 days, and before his death. The disciples track him down and try to **impose their limited vision on Jesus**.

They have enjoyed the buzz of feeling important, helping Jesus.

So they rebuke him: '**Everyone** is looking for you'. 'Everyone' again: we all want to be healed. Like Job.

But while praying, Jesus has discerned his next move, the purpose of his work as Messiah.

'Let us go to other towns; to **proclaim the Good News**, for *that is why I came*'.

In today's second reading, St Paul also describes his **life's duty: to proclaim the Good News**. He does it freely... We need to be very careful of anyone who would preach for profit.!

When we hear the **Good News, this truth that God loves us and all people, we have the answer to our suffering human condition. We are filled with joy, and called to help each other in suffering**. The Word transforms our whole life. Do we try to share it with others?