



Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Job 23:1-9. 16-17

Psalm 22:1-15

Mark 10:17-31

The Rev'd Canon Jenny Wilson

In the name of God, creating, redeeming, sanctifying, ... Amen.

He is trying to cut a deal. A deal in which he will earn eternal life. He is a good man, this man who runs up and kneels before Jesus. He senses that Jesus knows the way to eternal life. His longing for this life and his sense of the holiness of Jesus are clear. He is not like the religious leaders who try to trap Jesus. He is sincere. But he wants to cut a deal. What must I do? What actions and commitments of mine will give me, in exchange, eternal life? Jesus begins their conversation by going to the heart of their faith. The law. You know the commandments, he says. Oh, I've kept all those. I've kept all those since my youth. No murdering or committing adultery, not stealing or bearing false witness. And I have honoured them, my mother and father, I have always given honour to them.

Jesus responds giving what he gives, his presence. He looks at the man, he sees him, he loves him.

And then, he says, well if you're talking deals, this is the deal.

'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'

He's not just talking about money, I don't think. He's talking about everything that makes us feel secure. Everything on which our safety, our safety and the safety of those we love dearly, is based. Money and home and those relationships on which we cling. Everything which makes us feel safe. Sell it, let it go, give it to those in greater need and follow me, he says.

If you are talking deals, this is the deal. Let go of everything and follow.

And the man who had run and knelt and asked and named Jesus "Good" is shocked and walks away grieving, for he has many possessions.

And Jesus says to his disciples,

'How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!' The disciples are perplexed at these words. But Jesus says to them again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' They are greatly astounded and say to one another, 'Then

who can be saved?’ Jesus looks at them and says, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.’

Have you tried to thread a needle? Sitting with a piece of darning or embroidery or a button to sew on. Have you tried to thread a needle? It’s hard enough with a piece of cotton. It takes quite a few attempts in my experience. Jesus, that teacher who loves to use images from the world to help those listening to him understand, is not planning that we imagine trying to thread some sort of toy camel through some sort of large needle. He is presenting us with an image of the *impossible*. He wants us to *feel* that this is impossible. To feel the grief of the man who sadly walks away. To feel the grief for ourselves. For if we are honest, we would all like a deal. What we must do to inherit eternal life. And he’s stitched us up really. Well, we’ve stitched ourselves up. Because it’s not about deals. Not about an exchange. Not about that when we are dealing, if you like, with the one who looks at us and loves us. Not about that with Jesus. He’s about something else entirely.

For Jesus it's about a relationship. A relationship with the living God. Where, whilst for mortals, things are impossible, that is not so for God; for God all things are possible.

It’s about a relationship with the living God. If we can bring ourselves to step out and follow. And talk with God. And listen to God. Telling God the truth.

We see this relationship in action in our reading today from the Book of Job. Last Sunday, Bishop Chris beautifully led us on a reflection of the struggle of suffering in human life. The Book of Job is written by the wisdom writers of the Old Testament. The book opened, as we saw last Sunday, with a court scene in the heavenly realm. The Satan is the Accuser in the court. He challenges God to put his loyal servant Job to the test. Job is loyal when life is good. How will he fare when life deals him a time of awful suffering? So much has been taken away from him by the scene of this morning’s passage. Can there possibly be eternal life here? This week we are in chapter 23 of the Book of Job. And we see the relationship of a human being and God at work. Job engages robustly in this relationship. He speaks passionately with God.

*‘Today also my complaint is bitter;  
his hand is heavy despite my groaning.  
O that I knew where I might find him,  
that I might come even to his dwelling!  
I would lay my case before him,  
and fill my mouth with arguments.  
I would learn what he would answer me,  
and understand what he would say to me. ...  
God has made my heart faint;*

*the Almighty has terrified me;  
If only I could vanish in darkness,  
and thick darkness would cover my face!*

As the weeks go by this October and we see how the encounter with Job and God unfolds we will witness both Job and God engage robustly in the relationship into which God invites Job. And we will see God's response to Job's entreaties. And we will see how Job finally responds to God.

Leaving what keeps us safe behind and encountering God.

As with Job, often awful suffering happens to those who are innocent. Last Monday with fellow human beings across the world we found ourselves remembering the awful violence of October 7<sup>th</sup> and the days of awful violence that have followed. Our task is to witness and pray with fellow human beings in all parts of this. On October 7<sup>th</sup> in the United Kingdom, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi, Sir Ephraim Mirvis, and the chair of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board, Imam Qari Muhammad Asim, made their appeal in a letter published last Sunday.

Their letter says: "It has been a year since the brutal Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel, and the start of this devastating war in Gaza and beyond.

"During this time, the scale of human suffering has been horrific. As people of faith from Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities in the UK, while we may hold different views about aspects of the conflict, we stand united in our grief and in our belief that our shared humanity must bring us together.

"Our faiths and our humanity teach us that we should mourn for all the innocent people who have lost their lives."<sup>1</sup>

Two visitors came to Morning Prayer in the Dean's Chapel on Tuesday this week. In the time when we are invited to speak our own prayers, one of the ladies spoke about our longing for peace. She said "It looks impossible. But I am asking anyway."

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So many things that we bring to God do look impossible. The disciples named that, as the rich man wandered sadly away. But in the relationship that is God and each one of us created and loved by God, it seems that it's the praying that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/250421>

matters, the pouring out of our truth in the place of love that will bring the healing we cannot imagine.

What is our psalm chosen for today?

We find ourselves in the scriptures chosen for today the Psalm that Jesus cried out as he faced his most profound time of suffering, Psalm 22, the words “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Only the closeness of the Father and the Son, of God and Jesus, could bear the honesty of this cry. And we know then that whatever our struggle we will never be alone in it. The impossible will be held in the great love of God.

I wonder if he ever walked back, that sad rich man. I wonder if he sensed that there was more to say, more to know, a way to be shown about how to let go of all those things that made him safe. I wonder if he ever walked back. For we are him some days, clinging onto the things that make us safe. We are that man some days when following is too hard. I wonder if he ever walked back, or perhaps, Jesus walked by again and he had another chance. That Jesus might walk by us again and give us another chance.

Does it seem impossible? Like that lady who walked into Morning Prayer on Tuesday in our Cathedral we might pray. “It looks impossible. But I am asking anyway.”