

Sermon – 25 October (Communion Sunday)

Reading – Job 42:1-6

The text for the sermon is verse 5: “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.”

Once upon a time there lived a man with the name of “Job”. He was a wealthy man with many materialistic things that kept him busy and happy. In those days if you had a lot of sons you were considered as very rich. Sons would look after your well-being when you were old. They would also defend you against the enemy in times of trouble and conflict. This man had 7 sons. “Job” was, despite all his riches, a faithful servant of God. He even made sure his children lived in a relationship with the Lord.

But this man’s faith got tested. In one day he lost everything he had, his house, everything he owned and even all his three daughters and the 7 sons. If this was not enough he also got sick, infected with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head.

He then went into mourning by putting some ashes on his head without accusing God! Even when his wife tempted him to curse God he called her a fool!

He then went to his friends for some advice and it is obvious that they did not understand God’s dealings with humanity. They talked about things they did not know or understand themselves. But what is remarkable is that their answers did not please “Job” either. In his journey of despair, anger and grief He also went to God. He asked God why all these happened to him. He was a god-fearing man that did nothing wrong. WHY was he being punished?

Then there is a big silence. “Job” waits in suspense for God to answer him. And then from chapter 38 to 41 God indeed answers “Job” out of a storm. God says to him: How can you question my dealings with you? God exposes Job for what he really is--a finite creature. God presses him further and reproaches him, challenging him to come up with a better answer of why everything happened to him. God hammers Job by asking him unanswerable questions about creation, himself and the not understandable nature of some of the animals.

“Job” had to admit. He was speechless, unable to say one more word to

God. He admitted that he did not see God's fatherly hand testing him and making his faith stronger. He had to admit that He served his own "god" which he thought was in existence.

He had to admit that He did not see God for whom He was: the creator of Heaven and earth, the Almighty God who can do everything He wants to. "Job" was stunned by the powerful presence of God. He actually confesses that it was so wrong of him to question the actions of God.

He must have known better to know that God will not desert or punish him. God is too merciful and loving just to harm him. God had a reason and "Job" accepted that God's actions were the best for him. Although he was hurt, and still had no earthly riches, he knew that God was in control. He did the right thing to say "sorry". It is as though "Job's" true character comes to the fore when he humbles himself before God.

It is a fact that the story of Job was written along with Ecclesiastes as a protest against a philosophy which stated that bad things only happen to bad people. Job serves as a reminder that this is not true. Bad things can also happen to good people.

We live in a totally different time, so my question is: Is this story of Job still relevant to us? What can we learn from his life?

I do think it is relevant because the same thing can happen and indeed does happen to us as well. I read in the newspaper, the Evening News on the 5th of October 2015, of the story of modern day Job by the name of John Leslie Stott. He was a wealthy man who earned a lot of money through different television shows such as Blue Peter, Wheel of Fortune and ITV's This Morning. His career ended abruptly when he was accused of several charges of indecent assault. Although he was never found guilty, he lost everything, his fancy house, his big paycheck, his fiancée. He said in the article that "his life was "hell" when the allegations surfaced. He said: "It was about maintaining my innocence. I'd gone from earning over £300,000 to not a single penny coming in." According to him the turbulent years have changed his perspective on what really matters. He said: "Other things are more important to me, like my sanity and surviving and staying healthy and looking after my mum and dad." Unfortunately, in the newspapers it does not say that the modern day Job saw the whole picture of God working in his life.

I think we can learn a lot from both of the Jobs. And in many ways we can associate our lives, struggles, fears and despair with that of Job. But we can learn even more about God and his relation with humanity. The biggest lesson we must learn from his life story is:

- that we are all finite creatures who do not have the authority over life and death,
- that we do not have the power over sickness and health,
- and that we are the creatures who cannot grasp the greatness of God's existence.

We are speechless in the presence of God and must remain speechless. Job's encounter with God started first with a silence, and then God spoke to him. Our "communication"/prayers to God must start with a silence where He speaks to us first. And when we answer we must always do so in humble adoration like it is fitting of finite human creatures.

The life story of Job also gives us an insight into how God is ever present in our lives. God is merciful and loving and will never hurt his children. However He will use his children or situations to get a message across. In the case of Job I think He wanted to tell Job and his friends that they did not understand His Godly Being. God taught them the meaning of endurance.

His existence was greater than their expectations. They had to eat humble pie when they realised that God is totally different from humankind. He is the totally Other God who acts totally different from any human being in his love, justice, forgiveness and righteousness. And how true this is; to imagine that God gave humanity, you and me a second chance in Jesus Christ. God did the unthinkable; instead of punishment for our sins He showed compassion. Instead of damnation He showed mercy and love. He chose to free us from the bondages of sin and death. He overpowered death to give all the faithful the hope of everlasting life!

And when we experience difficult situations like Job did, then we have the certainty of God's presence through his Holy Spirit. We have the comfort of his Word which can sustain and help us in times of tribulation, struggle and crisis.

Job's confession in verse 5 is also fitting to us. We have "**SEEN**" God's

mercy and love in Jesus Christ and daily we “**HEAR**” stories of people who have been witnesses of God’s miraculous interventions. We have no reason to doubt God’s presence in our daily living. We have no excuse not to have faith in the God who made heaven and earth. We have no reason not to trust God:

- when we are sick,
- when our loved ones dies,
- when we lose our jobs,
- when we lose our sense of living,
- when we experience only tribulation and struggle,
- when our children go off track and worship other gods,
- when we struggle with depression, fear and anxieties,

They tell the story of this old woman who was not used to electricity. Although she made great effort to install it in her home she hardly ever used it. So when the engineer went to her home to check why she was not using the full capacity of her electricity, she said; I switch on my lights in the evening just to see how to light the lamps and then I switch it off again”

I think the same is true of us when it comes to our recognition of God’s powerful existence in our lives. We read our Bibles and acknowledge that God can do great things and that He sustains everything by his Fatherly hand. However, when we put our Bibles down it seems as if we go in default mode of doubt and feelings of hopelessness. It is as though we need the Bible to show us who God really is, but when it comes to our actions in life we totally lose sight of God’s power and might!

It would have been such a witness if Leslie, the modern day Job acknowledged the working of God in his life. May we never get to the point when we lose everything to lose our faith, too. Because it is only through God’s Holy Spirit that we can accept through faith the things we cannot change, but to change the things that we can and to have the wisdom which only God can give - to know the difference.

Amen