

17 October 2021

Sermon by Isaac De Jongh.

Themes: God the Creator and provider. Christ the suffering servant and saviour.

Readings: Job 38: 1-7. (34-41), Psalm 104: 1-10, 35-36, Hebrews 5:1-10, Mark 10:35-45

In the Apostles and the Nicene creeds we affirm our faith by saying the words “We believe in one God the Father, the Almighty creator of heaven and earth.”

Job 38: 1-7. (34-41),

God doesn't seem interested in Job's situation or in providing answers to any of Job's questions. Instead this is a God who has questions for Job – in today's reading - verse 3 God says “Brace yourself and stand up like a man; I shall put questions to you, and you must answer.”

What is striking about the divine speech is that it is full of powerful images that are focussed almost entirely on the workings of the universe itself, on things which humans know little about and over which we have no control. When you put chapters 38/41 alongside the first creation story in Genesis 1, there is a significant overlap – God is the one calling creation into being and setting it in motion before humans even existed. This is a God who just has to say the word and the forces of nature obey.

We know the story of Job and the tragedy he suffered and kept asking questions about what was happening but never lost faith in his God. In a universe created by God and in which we humans live, the challenge is how to hold two aspects together – 1) **the world is orderly** - God's creation is perfect and in order, nothing is out of place and this we cannot grasp, this is beyond our understanding, because we don't know and still searching for answers. 2) **tragedy doesn't always have a reason.** We experience things that go wrong we never expected and in our moment of blindness and ignorance we question God – **why** – and quickly forget who is the creator and provider. God tells Job and reminds us to “Brace yourself and stand up like a man; I shall put questions to you, and you must answer.”

In some ways, these two aspects shows very different realities that exist simultaneously. The fact that God responds with questions, though different than Job's, also suggest that the dialogue between them is ongoing, open and unfinished. This might be the best news of all. Job is not God but they are somehow connected to each other. How often are we disconnected and think we are God and have the answers for everything – how foolish and unwise.

Psalm 104: 1-10, 35-36

Ps 104 - **tells us of God the creator and provider.** This is psalm for God's wonderful works in the history of Israel, in creation and in the wider universe or cosmos. This Psalm focusing on the praises of God's mighty works, is a reminder of issues related to the environment and the earth in our time. We are called to be good stewards of God's creation.

God has placed us in this world alongside other creatures, each of us in our own place. We must occupy our own human places without destroying the habitat of the other creatures. This would exemplify true “rule” over the plant and animal realms. It does not mean that we were given a status that allows us to destroy and be the cause of their extinction from this earth. Once again we are called to be responsible and good stewards of God’s creation here on earth ensuring that we co-exist. As we affirm our faith we know -There is only one God creator and provider. “We brought nothing into the world, and we take nothing out. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away: blessed be the name of the Lord.” – Job 1: 21

Hebrews 5: 1-10

The Hebrews readings shows how Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment of God’s purpose for mankind. For the sake of Jewish Christians, in particular the author explains that Christ is superior to all other figures and his covenant is superior to all other relationships. Chapter 5 continues the point of Christ humanity and makes Him a uniquely qualified High Priest.

Jesus Christ is superior to all other prophets and all other claims to truth. Since God has given us Jesus Christ, we ought to listen to what he says and not move backwards. We need to remind each other, that the consequences of ignoring God are dire. As a community of faith we need to be present and live the legacy of His humility and the examples He left for us, because we belong to Christ. He is our salvation and our strength in times of trouble. “None of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself. If we live. We live to the Lord and if we die we die to the Lord: so then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.” We are his creation, we belong to God.

The book of Hebrews is important for drawing on many portions of the old testament in making a case that Christ is the ultimate and perfect expression of God’s plan for mankind – our creator, our redeemer and our sanctifier, who is alive at the centre of our being.

Mark 10: 35-45

A priest told a story of a friend who worked really hard at appearing humble. In public, he was always putting himself down, always declining praise when he’d done something good. But in private, it was a different story.

One time he told of a particularly generous thing he’d done for someone both knew. And then he said, “But of course, I don’t want anyone to know it was me.” Jesus says to give alms in secret.” And I thought, but you just told *me*.

This same friend complained – privately, of course – when he didn’t receive an award for service that he was hoping to get. He thought the person who did receive the award “didn’t go above and beyond the call of duty” as much as he did, and wasn’t humble enough.

In reality, the friend was pretty proud of his humility. He didn’t understand that true humility comes from thinking less about yourself, and more of someone else. Real humility is the foundation of real greatness, particularly because it doesn’t care at all about recognition or glory; it only cares about the good of others.

Jesus has been teaching his disciples as they travel one last time to Jerusalem from Galilee. Some of the people following him surely think this will be the time when he restores the Kingdom of David, and leads Israel in a military rebellion against Rome.

Others are hoping he will help to reform a corrupt Temple and restore worship of the One True God to its rightful place in Jewish life. But Jesus isn't about rebellion, or religious reform. Jesus has a completely different plan in mind.

Three times, Jesus has announced that he will go to Jerusalem to be tortured and killed. But on the third day, he says he will be raised from death. The first time he made this announcement was just after Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ. It's the first time Mark has used that word, "Christ," since the opening verse of his gospel.[\[1\]](#)

The second prediction of torture, death, and resurrection follows the Transfiguration. Now we are on the way to Jerusalem.

Once more, Jesus tells his disciples that he must be betrayed, turned over to the Gentiles by the Jewish authorities, and killed. And after three days he will rise again. Mark tells us that the disciples are "amazed" and those who follow are "afraid." (v.32) They still do not understand that the Christ isn't about rebellion or reform, but resurrection.

When someone shows you a picture of a group of people that includes you, who's the first person you look for? Yourself—all this self-promotion and self-focus is brought about by a heart of pride. It's a self-promoting heart that vomits all over these verses, as the disciples are still focused on who will be the greatest. How proud are your heart, my heart, and the disciples' hearts? Being the greatest leads us away from God's purpose for us.

We are given the free will of being in control of our soul, and often pride becomes a cardinal sin that lead our ego to be proud. That is why in the New Testament we are told to put on humility, be clothed with humility, walk in humility. But it's not easy. Pride is the defining sin of humanity. All sin has its root in pride—all temptations are based on pride. That is why we all struggle with being self-centred and self-promoting. Pride is a deep-seated reality in all of us—all of us.

That is why the Lord is having a tough time getting the apostles to understand true spiritual greatness. The eleven love Christ, love the truth—they believe in Christ, they are saved, they are regenerate. But they still battle with pride. They only think of the Kingdom as power and position, so two of the disciples want a position of greatness. They've worked hard—they've sacrificed for Christ. So they want a reward.

The disciples want position, authority, power and wealth—like all of us. So have you wondered, "How can they possibly ask Jesus about being the greatest immediately after the Lord just describes His coming torture, suffering and death? Jesus says, "I am going to die for you." Yet they say, "Lord I want the best reward and highest position." Why? They desperately need humility—and my friends, so do we! Join me in praying for a humble heart. What do we look out for? The path to greatness is humility, not self-promotion. God honoured Abraham, who said in Genesis 18, "*Who am I, I am the least?*" God blessed Jacob, who said, "*I am not worthy of the least of your mercies.*" God rewards Moses, who said,

“Who am I that I should go and lead this people?” The disciples should have known, esteemed, and loved humility, and also hated self-promotion and pride—but they didn’t.

If you want to be great with Christ, great in God’s eyes? Spend your life giving people what they need. Consider all other people to be served, and consider everyone else to be your master. And what was the actual service that Christ rendered? The end of verse 45, [Mark 10:45](#), *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life [WHY?] a ransom for many.”* Ransom is the Greek word meaning the price paid for the release of a slave. To whom was the ransom paid? To God—He is the judge who had to be satisfied.

And how was He? Jesus Himself is the ransom, Jesus is the substitute. Jesus dies a vicarious, substitutionary death on behalf of sinners. Jesus gave His life to pay the price in full. The price of sin had to be paid to God to satisfy His divine justice. The price that Christ paid satisfied God. His death settled God’s justice.

And His one death satisfied God for many. The one Son of Man pays the ransom for many. One great act of sacrifice provided salvation for many. So the path to glory in God’s Kingdom, greatness in God’s eyes, is through humble sacrifice, viewing yourself as a servant, treating yourself as a slave with Christ as your example to follow.

Christ was a servant and a slave, then was exalted by His Father, and given a name which is above any other name—better, showing us the path to greatness is not the world’s way, it’s God’s way . . . not self-promotion, but self-denial. So are you aware of . . . Christ legacy. On Sunday 31st October 2021 we are called to re-dedicate ourselves. - **It requires your time, your talent and your resources (money).**

To serve others, you have to be around those you are to serve. Sadly today, weak churches have encouraged a spectator mentality where it’s okay to watch the Sunday show occasionally, without any mention of the commands to serve and love each other. Every Sunday we pray and offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice – as we re-dedicate ourselves let us offer ourselves to God as visible sacrifice and be of service to our community of faith.

The joy and blessing of Christ is found in the community of the local church—there are some pains, yes, but great joy! This is the Body of Christ, His Bride. Therefore, you are to function in ministry, you are to be interconnected to people of the local church relationally. **We heard of ecumenical during the season of creation.** That is not optional for an obedient Christian. Get involved, get tied into a ministry where people know you, support you, pray for you, love each other, build each other up, disciple each other—that is normal New Testament Christianity.

The greatest among us are the servants—and servants serve! Don’t let anything stop you from serving. Don’t allow sports, entertainment, functions, family, health, job, or relationships get in the way of faithfully serving. This is the only path to true spiritual greatness, and true spiritual impact in this life. Everything we do that’s filled with the Spirit does count for God’s glory. But to be obedient, to be great, to be in the Spirit, you will faithfully use your gifts to serve others in the church. Commit to faithfully serve and indicate what your **TIME**, your **TALENT** and your **RESOURCES** are, in building the Kingdom.

As we truly serve others and slave for others, it puts Christ on display and gives us the perfect opportunity to share about how Christ served and sacrificed for us. Your purpose on

this planet is to let others know that God became a man to bear God's wrath for your sin, then rise from the dead to be unashamed. We were reminded that our purpose is calling others to repentance is what brings joy to Heaven and to our hearts

Only those who are willing to slave, to consider everyone to be your master, to humble yourself so you could wash the feet of the ungrateful—only those will experience true greatness in God's eyes, and true joy in your heart. Do you see yourself as a slave, doing whatever Christ commands? Only the humble follow God's Word, no matter what. To be a servant, then a slave, requires a humble heart. And every humble heart will serve, even slave, for God's glory.

Christ alone can change your heart so that you want to obey. Christ alone transforms you so that you want to follow Christ. Christ alone causes a person to become obedient from the heart. And that means if you're a genuine believer you will follow Christ, obey Christ, become a servant, desire to slave, and imitate Christ. And true Christians know they can't do any of this on their own—we must depend on the Holy Spirit in order to serve and slave.

We have the opportunity now to dedicate ourselves to his serves by offering our **time, our talents and resources** to building the Kingdom of God here on earth. Depend on Christ to serve and slave for His glory. Let's worship Christ now by our obedience to His Word. Let's remember who our "Dear Lord and Father of mankind" is – Christ the suffering servant and saviour. Amen.