

Pentecost 22 2024 All Souls **OBEDIENCE, SUFFERING AND JUSTICE** dtw

Job 38 1-3 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man. I will question you, and you shall declare to me"

Heb 5.7-10 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him...

I can still see the billboard, walking up the steps of Adelaide Railway Station to North Terrace in the 70's, 'Love means never having to say you're sorry'. It was promoting the movie, *Love Story*. Even in my early twenties I knew it was wrong. And since then, I have discovered that love not only means having to say you're sorry; that's the easy part; it means having to change from the inside out and that's the hard part.

Life is often thought of in terms of a journey or a road that must be travelled. It doesn't matter where we come from or what religious or philosophical background we grew up in; the imagery is the same. So, when we talk about our lives we say, without even thinking about it, that we 'encountered obstacles' or 'arrived at a crossroad' or 'faced an uphill struggle'. We all talk about issues in our lives in terms of 'finding our way', 'getting lost' or 'knowing where we are going'. We observe times when we are 'at the peak of our career' or 'in the valley of despair', like Job. Even in an age of many alternatives to walking – the car, bus, train, plane, bike, e-bike and cyber space, the image of life as a walk along the way is one to which we can all relate.

Yet how to walk the way of life presents dilemmas; for most of us it is less a straight path than an obstacle course, less a fairway than a bunker. Today, when faced with the demands of life, many of us are afflicted with Columbus syndrome. Christopher Columbus set off and didn't know where he was going; when he got there he didn't know where he was and when he returned, he wasn't sure where he'd been. The only real novelty about Columbus is that he stumbled across the New World and the rest is history. (Some of which we'd rather forget). 250 years later it was our turn with James Cook and Co. (again, some of which we'd rather forget) He was off to discover Terra Australis. And here we are. Of course, the first nations people were already here and as a nation we are still trying to come to grips with that 250 years later. I suspect that our national psyche and identity will only find its true authenticity when we do, walking together in truth, and in truth-telling. 'Walking Together' is a beautiful description, used by the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury a few years ago, for the Ecumenical journey.

The idea of 'walking with God' is also a universal image, and an old image at that: it goes back thousands of years. In fact, it is found in the oldest part of the Bible. The Hebrew word for some of the Old Testament is *Torah*, which is best translated 'direction', rather than Law. It brings with it the sense of the right guidance for walking the way of life.

My first text was from the Book of Job. The Story of Job comes from the Wisdom Literature of the Bible. Job was an innocent man who suffered unimaginable loss and endured pain through no fault of his own. We talk about the 'patience of Job' but that's an understatement. It was more like extreme endurance. Such loss, however, is not foreign to Australians who are often found reeling from the effects of huge floods and fires, often with the loss not only of homes, property, and stock, but sometime, also loved ones. In our current economic and social climate, the basic things of life: health, education, work, housing, values, the safety of women and children, are creating alarming issues and questions. In the

wider world, unimaginable war, violence and death is the case in the Middle East, Ukraine and many other places. I find it almost *surreal*, a word that many Australian young people are using more and more amidst life's uncertainties today, and uncertainties abound in this nation. What can we do about it?

Whatever our circumstances in life, none of us is on such a fixed path that we cannot change or be the instrument for change. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world". That's exactly what repentance means: change and change for the better. It means change in attitudes, change in behaviour, change in relationships, change in communities, change in churches, change in nations. And it will only happen by intention. Christians are called to see the bigger picture of life, God's picture. God's picture of our nation and our world is exciting, it is breath-taking, it is life-giving and it is whole. We can be sure of that because at the very beginning of creation God saw everything that was made and it was 'very good' (Gen 1. 31) We call this 'original blessing' and our journey and job, with God's help, is to grasp it back with both hands!

I believe that God is calling us into a new sense of responsibility one to another, to refugees and to our neighbours. Isn't it a privilege, to pursue the real needs of the last, the least and the lost? On the cross, Jesus seemed like a failure, but, to quote my second text, 'he offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.' He was a 'mouse that roared', but now billions over the centuries have listened. You and I are called to be that roar today. I am proud to be an Australian, but I am no longer content with a laissez-faire attitude or mediocrity. One keeps hearing in the wake of fire, floods, political, economic and moral woes, "life must go on" and that is true. But it is not the whole truth. The Aussie spirit must surely contain more than this. For many people life has changed – forever. It can and will never be the same. I know chronic gamblers, alcoholics, depressed, estranged, broke, broken and suicidal people. "Them's the breaks; life goes on", or "it is what it is" doesn't wash; it's an insult to whatever intelligence is left. Life of a different kind, a different dimension has to begin. Some of it will be too tough to contemplate; some of it will be more glorious by far. Can we believe this – that there is meant to be more? Can we believe that in and through these people, events, tragedies, times of despair, anger and trauma, there are things being said to us from beyond our limited perspectives, beyond time and space? I believe we can. A question then for all of us: Where can I be an instrument for change? Where can I be an instrument for what God is wanting to say to this world? Can my little story make a difference in this world?

Our nation needs a vision of something more than life merely going on. Just one example among many is Gambling Reform. (We have the highest per capita rate of gambling in the world. Over 25 billion dollars a year is lost to gambling, while governments keep comfortably quiet) The too hard basket is just not good enough; thousands, indeed millions of lives are at stake. Some time ago now, I remember the Dalai Lama telling the National Press Club that they should be like 'elephants with long noses', truly sniffing out the whole truth, investigating what often lies beneath, bringing that bit more integrity to their work and pride to our nation. Our gospel sees Jesus calling ordinary working-class fishers to vulnerable intentional servant ministry, following his example. They left their nets, their whole livelihoods and followed him into salvation history. You and I are their successors. We are Australian Christians. We have work to do in this Great Southland of the Holy Spirit. This is our journey in life. This is our call to repentant living. This is our call to make a difference. This is our Story, and this is our Song. Amen