

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

4th February 2024 - 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year B): 1st: Job 7:1-4,6-7. Ps 146(147):1-6. 2nd: 1 Cor 9:16-19,22-23. **Gospel:** Mark 1:29-39.

We can all resonate with Job, even today's youngsters know about it. A very human reading. All of today's readings come together in their portraits of people under pressure, under stress.

Job offers a profound insight into the condition of one who is utterly broken and deflated by suffering. The brokenness and despair, the alienation of estrangement from God that is the lot of many souls is movingly portrayed in the reading from Job. We find Job here without joy and without hope. His life has been, he feels, a waste of time. Life seems point-less for Job. Is this a call to something more, something greater?

The Psalm suggests a great Divine Plan, but who can see it? The very long Book of Job confronts all this. Maybe this is probably the right time to read all that long book.

The Psalm is a hymn of praise to God; the healing God for the downcast; consolation for the lowly and the broken hearted - the mighty God of all creation, who gives their names to all the stars, is wise - God knows what God is doing! The God who brings home the scattered and exiled, the God who lifts up the poor and powerless. Despite all his losses and suffering Job doesn't lose his faith in God.

Paul, in the 2nd reading, finds his apostolic energy comes in no small way from the press of duty which his conscience lays on him.

Jesus enters such broken and defeated lives to restore them to hope and meaning. In the gospel, Mark portrays Jesus under the pressure not just of so many coming for healing, but also of being misunderstood: he is the victim of his own popularity, in danger of being restricted from his wider mission.

Mark lets us know that the power of Jesus, manifested in his days preaching and healing, comes from God who is encountered in prayer.

When we pray for those who are sick and ask God for healing, we are doing an act of mercy. However, the hoped for healing is not the end goal of our prayer or of God's action.

Jesus says it plainly in today's gospel. His purpose is to preach the good news. When we or our loved ones get sick, good news is knowing that we are not alone, especially when we are at our most helpless.

Sickness prevents us from doing the things we normally do. We can't enjoy the ordinary pleasures of life, and we are separated from our circle of friends and colleagues. Illness disconnects us from life and from our community and it isolates from the world.

Remembering the sick, praying for them, and visiting them restores that connection. It brings the people who are sick, even if they are not physically present, back into the hearts and minds of the community.

And when a cure is not possible, we can still continue to preach Jesus' good news for our loved ones – that they will never be alone in their suffering.

Christ is present, and we, hands and feet of Christ are present too.

All this is even more vital in this turbulent time, with so many ill, and a very stretched NHS etc. and here in Cornwall people moved to hospitals far away, making visiting difficult, almost impossible, not to mention infections therein.

When recovery of health does happen, our mission to preach the good news does not end. The final purpose of healing is praise of God and service of God's people, because when the person returns to the community with their health restored, they may give God thanks in the midst of the church. This is our service, our sacrifice and offering of praise.

Like Simon's mother-in-law, who when she was healed, waited on others, we, too, use the blessing of healing to serve those in need and to continue to preach the good news of Christ.