

5th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME YEAR B HOMILY ESSENDON 2021
JESUS CONTINUES TO HEAL AND TEACH WITH AUTHORITY

Mk 1.29-39

Job 7.1-7

1Cor 9.16-25

I was asked the other day why does God let terrible things happen, especially to good people, by Megan, a bereaved mother of her 23 year old daughter, who had just died after suffering a terrible illness with a ravaging rare cancer, the effects of which could not be reversed, by all professional efforts at treatment. Caidan had her life ahead of her, having just been appointed as a teacher at Our Lady's School in West Essendon for 2020, thwarted by the coronavirus lockdown and serious illness, but being able and determined to marry the love of her life, Nick, only last December, when she and he knew her days were numbered.

I quote some wise words from the strong and powerful Caidan herself: ***“Life is too short. Life is unpredictable. Life is meant to be lived, and while you are able to live it, do it with everything you’ve got. Don’t waste it; you never know when you could be met with something that will change your world.”*** Sadly, she died last Tuesday, after a brave and determined fight, leaving behind many happy memories, but a very sad and grieving and questioning, loving husband and partner, and family.

The only explanation I could offer is that we humans are fragile and complex creatures, in a defectible, imperfect, but wonderful world, prone to things going terribly wrong at times. Medical science can address many health issues and reduce human suffering and pain, but in the end, we have to face our mortality, confronting as that reality is for all of us. It's just that life can be so unfair when a younger person is taken before her or his time, and we can't but help asking why and feeling frustration and even, naturally, anger about it.

The story of Job fits well into this complicated theme, coming from a human situation where poor old miserable Job feels that the world is against him, having lost his 10 children, rejected by his wife, lost his job, his home and his friends, who are of no help when he seeks their understanding and advice. All they can say is that he must have done something to have deserved going down the black hole. We can't blame him for being depressed, and he is somewhat self-righteous about having done his best to be a good person. When so much has gone wrong in his life, one might wonder if he mightn't have done something to bring about some of his bad luck, but the fundamental point is that bad things can and do happen to good people, and that this is not God's Will, as some might like to think.

To my mind, God's will is that we make the most of our opportunities in life, find happiness and fulfilment where we can, using the gift of free will well and living and acting according to our consciences, to try and make the right choices and do good where we can, whilst avoiding evil.

Job realizes in the end that God is there for him, and offers him hope and peace of mind, despite it all, easier said than done, of course. Things do come good for him in the end, and his wife even comes back to him, apparently for another 10 children, so the story says!! But let's just leave it at that, a sort of parable for facing up to the difficulties of life, and the darker moments that come to us all here and there, often through no fault of our own.

We can't do much about preventing natural disasters, although, in more recent times, we've witnessed the increased devastation from the effects of climate change, which could well be reduced by humans, if we appreciate the science, and listen to the scientists and take precautions against increasing, but lessening our carbon emissions for the protection of our precious planet and so the future for our children and our children's children's children, and so on life goes, whether you and I are here or not.

The first day of Jesus' journey into public ministry continues on in Capernaum as he encounters Peter's mother-in-law, reaching out to touch and heal her, as she responds by putting on the tea and scones for all, or whatever might have been the custom of the time. It's not about the female role of providing service so much as the call to all to respond in reaching out to others, offering hospitality and welcome, whoever a person might be. The indiscriminate and inclusive nature of Jesus' ministry is clear from the start.

Significantly, he moves from the temple out into where the people are, as he encounters them in their own situation or milieu. He is constantly on the move, and wastes no time moving on from Capernaum into the

broader region of Galilee, setting a pattern for the early Christian communities to grow, diversify and spread, as the good news of the Kingdom he proclaims cannot be contained in one spot nor in one select community of family or friends. It has to spread and grow, influenced by our determination to lead by example in living his Gospel, as I reflected with our 520+ primary school students and 50+ teachers and staff, here at St Therese's, at our welcome back and opening outdoor paraliturgy this week. Our theme was letting out light shine, and appreciating our individuality but also our need to work together as people enlightened by Jesus.

To some degree, the Temple is left behind, but not altogether, as Jesus often enough returns for further preaching and confrontation at times, with the religious leaders, who have become insular, possessive and protective of their own territory, but in the process denying the ordinary people access, with their superior know-it-all judgemental attitudes.

This is the path of Christian discipleship we are all called to follow in our own way, at whatever age and stage of life we are at. Despite what can and will go wrong in our lives, at times, we are assured of the presence of Jesus guiding our way as people of faith.

john hannon

7th February 2021