

BIBLE READINGS: Job 23:1-9, 16-17 Mark 10:17-31

SERMON

The readings today hit too close to home, at least for me they do and I have struggled with how to approach them and where to go with them. There have been many days when I have been like Job and wondered what God was doing. And the writer of Hebrews reminds me of the Word of God being sharp, cutting through my life and reminding me of things I would rather not be reminded of. Mark's Gospel reading for today reminds me that it isn't because of what I do or how much I have in material goods that God loves me. God loves me because "I am", it's my being, and how I open my heart to Christ and God's word and how I let it work in my heart so that God can touch others.

God's love is a gift that touches my struggles, touches my life, and reminds me constantly that no matter how difficult life gets, how easy it would be just to give up, that if I just try and open my heart and my hands and reach out, God will guide me through.

Job must have really wondered about what was going on. He has had everything taken away. In Jewish culture the more you had, the more it was believed that one was blessed by God. In fact, there are many who still believe that today! For Job to lose everything meant he must have some sin that God was punishing him for, even though he had led a seemingly blameless life. Even Job doesn't understand what has happened.

Job cries out in great anguish and pain searching for what God is doing in his life. We have all been there, probably. The days, weeks, months, sometimes years, when we feel like nothing is going right and God seems distant. We feel like we have let everyone down, we feel we are of no use or value to anyone. It's a hard place to be in because we feel torn as we try and discern the answers to the question "Where are you God in all of this?" "What have I done wrong to be punished so?" "When will it all end?". Painful, heart-wrenching questions. And for some people, when the view becomes so limited, they take their own lives because they can no longer deal with the pain and the suffering. And that's when we wonder where God was for them. Where was God's love and presence?

I can't answer that question because there are many days where I struggle with the same thing. Job's words could be mine many days. I can't see God, I can't find God, I have little hope and I'm at the end of my resources but it is my faith in God that keeps me going. This passage from Job tells us that it is natural to want to give up, to feel at the end of our resources when the pain of broken relationships, illness or other events in our lives cause us to feel lost and to give up hope. This is where we have to admit that God is the ruler of our hearts and lives and we need to rely on God's love and grace to pull us through, no matter how dark, difficult and desperate it may get. "Our hope is in the Lord, who has made heaven and earth."

God's love and grace is the rope that will pull us through the eye of the needle. We can "do" all kinds of good works and obey all the commandments just as the young man did in today's Gospel, just as we are told Job did. But Christ goes further and challenges us and the rich young man. We are called to be willing to be open to God's calling in our lives, to open our hearts and our hands and be willing to give up that which would cut us off from the love of Christ.

What is there in our own personal lives that would cut us off from the love of God? This isn't just about giving up material wealth. There are those of us who have very little in the way of material goods to give up. What is there in our personal lives that doesn't make us open to Christ? A habit, a person, an event, maybe even a struggle; these are just some of the things which prevent us from opening our hands and our hearts to accept the gift of God's love and grace through Christ.

Yes, it may mean giving up something or someone we love and it will be very, very difficult to give up. It means repenting of what we have done and left undone. It means letting God prune our lives with the two edged sword. But if we let all this happen then we can bring the love of Christ to touch the hearts of others, but only if we turn to God and let our hearts and our lives be open to God so God can touch them and bring the healing and the hope we need for renewal. In that way, God threads us through the needle. We cannot get through the needle or inherit eternal life on our own - it is only through accepting Christ that we receive eternal life.

To go through the eye of the needle, each of us needs to let Christ into our lives. Turn to God, repent of what we have done wrong, accept God's invitation to new life and God's free gift of grace and love. That's all. We don't need to "do" or "buy" anything. Limited perspective or unlimited grace through Christ the Lord? I invite you to open your hearts to Christ, and let him take away the loneliness and the pain and let God work in you more than you ever thought possible, through His love, his hope and his grace.