

Mark 10:17-31

A wealthy man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus answers that he must follow the commandments – which the man claims he has done. Then Jesus tells him to sell all his possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow him, at which point the man goes away sad. Then Jesus teaches that it is very hard for the wealthy to enter God's Reign. When Peter points out that the disciples have left everything to follow him, Jesus responds that those who have left behind loved ones and possessions for the Reign of God will receive much more in return, both in this life and in the one to come.

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age – houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

COCU60B Readings

The overwhelming awareness in this week's Scripture passages is of the reality of suffering, and the pain and indignity that it brings. In Job, the suffering of Job is made worse by his sense of abandonment by God, and his longing to put his case before God. In Psalm 22 the sense of abandonment is echoed, as the Psalmist speaks of being persecuted, without any sense of God's presence or rescue. In Hebrews we find the assurance that Jesus is trustworthy because he was tempted as we are and overcame, and because he offers us mercy. Finally in the Gospel, after graphically revealing how hard it is for the wealthy to embrace the sacrificial life of God's Reign, Jesus assures his disciples that their sacrifice – and the persecution which they will certainly experience – is not in vain, and that God will restore good things to them. A huge part of the struggle for those who suffer is the sense of loneliness, isolation and unwantedness that is brought on by the pain, and that heightens it. Even Jesus shared this experience. However, underlying all of it, is the assurance of God's compassion and the mercy that God offers. And, in Jesus' words in Mark's Gospel, there is the call for us to be agents of God's mercy, grace and friendship.

“I have come more and more to realize that it is being unwanted that is the worst disease that any human being can experience.” (Mother Teresa)

Our world is full of “shadow people” – the unseen sufferers who struggle daily with poverty, dread & infectious diseases, lack of clean water and sanitation, with few resources and fewer opportunities. For many of the wealthy, these people remain unseen even when they live next door, and “out of site” is “out of mind.” It is easy to fall into the trap of viewing these “shadow people” as “issues” to be resolved. It is easy to lose our sense of their humanity, even as we fight for justice on their behalf. It is easy, as we, who are relatively comfortable, secure and wealthy, go to “help” those who suffer that we embrace an uneven power dynamic in which we are “saviours” coming to “uplift” and “rescue” the “poor.” The call of the Lectionary this week to do more than this. A powerful, healing work of justice is to really notice the “shadow people,” to acknowledge and honour their humanity, and then to offer, not just a hand of help, but a hand of friendship and solidarity. (John van de Laar, *Sacredise*)

Psalm 22:1-15

A cry for God's presence and rescue in a time of great persecution and trial in which God seems to have forsaken the Psalmist. God is holy and the Psalmist's ancestors trusted God and were saved, but now the Psalmist is being attacked, and is suffering greatly, and no rescue seems to be forthcoming.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you our ancestors trusted;

they trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried, and were saved;

in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; "Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver— let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"

Yet it was you who took me from the womb;

you kept me safe on my mother's breast.

On you I was cast from my birth,

and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near

and there is no one to help.

Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

Job 23:1-9, 16-17

Job longs to put his case before God, but he does not know how to find God. If he could get to God's dwelling place, he believes, he could lay out his case, but God is absent to him.

Then Job answered: "Today also my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy despite my groaning. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his dwelling! I would lay my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; but he would give heed to me. There an upright person could reason with him, and I should be acquitted forever by my judge.

"If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him.

God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me; If only I could vanish in darkness, and thick darkness would cover my face!"

Hebrews 4:12-16

God's word is sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing into the deepest parts of our beings and judging our thoughts and intentions. Therefore we need to keep our trust in Jesus who was tempted in every way, as we are but did not sin. In him we can draw near to God's throne and find grace.

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.