

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday 17 August, 2025 – 9th Sunday after Trinity
Why Do People Suffer?
Reading – Job 19

Our reading today is from Job – a book in the Bible that many will avoid. Yet, Job resonates with people of all backgrounds because it explores the theme of human suffering. The opening describes a man of extraordinary goodness and prosperity upon whom calamities also of extraordinary intensity suddenly fall. The story of Job captures our attention and evokes our sympathy but at the same time it triggers our deepest fears. Who among us has not experienced situations where we asked the question why? – Why has this happened?

Why have I chosen Job as our reading this morning? Revd. Jon sent out the rota without assigning readings and when I checked with him what to do, he reminded me that the reading in the lectionary is the book of Job and I may want to consider it. Although, Revd. Jon might not have thought he was challenging me, but I took it as a challenge. 1st, many of us will skip over the book of Job when reading our Bible. Job is hardly the choice reading for most Christians. 2nd, I realise that I have never heard Job preached – have you?

On the day I sat down to consider how I will approach the talk, I had a telephone conversation with Roz Doherty, who asked what I am up to. I responded that I am busy thinking through how to present the book of Job. I explained to her that the story of Job opposes the meritocracy viewpoint of the world where people are viewed as deserving of whatever conditions they are in e.g., if you are not successful, then you have been lazy or you are not smart – a viewpoint that has been highlighted recently by Trump et al. As a result, I wondered how many people listening to me will hold that view point.

Roz assured me that on the contrary, the majority of HTS members are likely to hold the view that we live in a fallen world where bad things happen to good people and bad people may be successful and live in prosperity. Being assured by Roz of your understanding of Job as an exemplar of patient trust, I decided to talk about the Job whose name to the world, may be synonymous with suffering but understood by you and I as a man of profound and awesome faith.

The book of Job is a great work of literature written in Hebrew poetry, it has been placed at par with the works of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Milton and Shakespeare. I strongly recommend that you add Job to your reading list. Job is also a work of philosophy asking the questions philosophers have pondered throughout the history of mankind. Why are we here? What is life about? Where did evil come from? Why do good people suffer? In addition, Job is a book of theology because, theology relates all these questions to God and asks - What is God's involvement in the world?

I chose Job 19 as our reading because of the refrain, "I know that my Redeemer lives", used in Handel's Messiah and also some of the hymns I grew up with as an Anglican. Job's friends wrongly assumed that suffering always come as a result of

sin and they tried to persuade Job to repent of his sin. Job, too, wrongly thought that God was treating him as an enemy when in fact God was his friend, thought highly of him and was proud of him. Although Job pointed wrongly at God as the cause of his troubles, nevertheless, he continued to cry out to be heard by God.

Verse 25 has Job's affirmation of confidence – "I know that my Redeemer lives!" Faced with death and decay, Job states in verse 26, "In my flesh I will see God," making Job one of the first in the Bible to talk about the resurrection of the body. Although the idea that God was against him troubled Job and he pestered God to explain why, yet, Job firmly believed that in the end, he will see God. What tremendous faith Job demonstrates!

From chapter 38 to 41, God takes centre stage and interrogates Job. God did not accuse Job of wickedness neither did God explain himself because the reasons why such calamities happened to Job must remain a mystery. In my culture, one of the names for God is "One who cannot be asked to explain himself." We were not there when earth's foundations were laid and God does not consult with humans about any aspect of sustaining the created world! What God's questions did was to bring Job to a place of surrender where Job discovered the greatness of God and only then could he see that God had remained with him throughout his suffering.

Our lesson from Job is to recognise that God's questions are for us too. And whenever life's circumstances make us question why, we need to read Job chapters 38 – 41 and let God address his questions to us. Like Job, we must allow those questions to bring us to a place of surrender where we recognise and accept that we are not in control – God is. We must acknowledge our finite smallness in the arms of God's infinite greatness and yield to God's mysterious ways which are beyond our understanding. And when like Job, we discover God's awesome greatness, our only proper response is worship! We do not know and we can never know the mind of God, but we have the assurance that God is with us; God is for us and God is in us. He is faithful and one day we will see him face to face!

I close with this prayer of Saint Benedict: - words on the screen.

Gracious and Holy Father, give me the wisdom to discover you, the intelligence to understand you, the diligence to seek after you, the patience to wait for you, eyes to behold you, a heart to meditate upon you, and a life to proclaim you through the power of the Spirit of Jesus, my Lord. Amen

Dolapo Ogunbawo