

St Andrews on the Terrace Sunday 8 July 2018 Pentecost 7 'Wisdom Where art thou?'

Readings for the Gathering

Hebrew Bible

Job 1: 8-9; 6: 11-17

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied.

Job 6: 11-17

Then Job asked: "What strength do I have, that I should still hope? What prospects, that I should be patient? Do I have the strength of stone? Is my flesh bronze? Do I have any power to help myself, now that success has been driven from me? "Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty. But my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams, as the streams that overflow when darkened by thawing ice and swollen with melting snow, but that stop flowing in the dry season, and in the heat vanish from their channels.

Gospel

Luke 2: 41-52

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in God's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and people.

Contemporary reading

Gustav Jung

Your visions will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.

The Reflection

Towards the centre of the Bible lie books named as the Wisdom Literature. The first five Books are the ancient Hebrew Torah or law – sometimes called the law of Moses. Last week we thought about the matriarchs and patriarchs whose legendary stories form the basis of those early books.

Then follows a large section of books of Jewish history which cover the entry into Canaan from Egypt, (Joshua) the fortunes of Israel under the time of the judges described in the books of Judges and Ruth.

Then is recorded the time of the prophets Samuel, Elijah and Elisha in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles. This history merges with the beginning of the rule of kings of Israel first Saul then David, (great grandson of the famous Ruth), and Solomon.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah follow for two different reasons. Ezra seems to have helped with the history writing so important as the nation's story was gathered, collated and edited in the more peaceful times of the kingdoms for David and Solomon. Nehemiah is the key figure in the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the return from exile in Babylon. The book of Esther included next is a story from within that period of exile. Another brave woman.

The final seventeen books in the Hebrew Bible are named for prophets. Next week we will look at their role in society then and now.

In between the books of history and the books of the prophets are five of wisdom literature: the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon. The grouping of these as wisdom books indicates a change of genre. We have moved on through the biblical library shelves from law to history and now to wisdom sayings or poetry.

This means we read these books differently. Hebrew poetry as seen in the psalms, for example, frequently uses a poetical device called parallelism. A statement is made, then repeated, in slightly different words, but with the same meaning. For instance in Psalm 23, the idea that the shepherd restores our soul is the same thought as the next line, that the shepherd leads us in the paths of righteousness. The meaning is that our souls *are* restored by being lead the right way.

The book of Proverbs is a collection of wisdom sayings. In the east these are known as koans. A koan is a riddle or puzzle that Zen Buddhists still use during meditation to help them unravel greater truths about the world and about themselves. While we can puzzle away at a proverb, in the end their meaning can be discerned best by spirit and intuition, rather than the application of rational thought. This tells us the wisdom enshrined in these books is not rational knowledge, but supra-rational insight. It is more of a spiritual intuitiveness and discernment which is the sense of Wisdom here.

A female personification of Wisdom actually appears in these books. For instance, we read in the first chapter of Proverbs:

²⁰ *Out in the open Wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square;*

²¹ *on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech:*

²² *"How long will you who are simple love your simple ways?*

How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?

The story of Job is so well known it is referred to in our society's general conversation. We know the phrase 'Job's comforters' and 'escape by the skin of your teeth' (Job 19:20). The concept of a Behemoth comes from Job chapter 40. Also the phrase 'the ends of the earth' occurs in Job and other books. We refer to someone having 'the patience of Job.'

We should take our clue from the placing of the book within the wisdom section of the Bible, however, and not expect this story to be of a real man in real time dealing in actual events. Scholars, particularly those who take a psycho-spiritual approach, think this may be an account of active imagination and dreams engaged in by a person through the process of individuation. We could call it maturing into the second stage of adulthood. Or, as it is colloquially known, this book could be called the account of a mid life crisis.¹

Under this type of interpretation, the 'God' character here personifies the true Self (capital S) or psyche. The character 'Job' represents all of us in our as yet immature ego state. 'Satan' acts overtly here as 'Lucifer' which means 'bringer of light'. It is Satan's *helpful* if traumatic intervention which sets the scene for Job to begin the demanding individuation process. Under Jung's own interpretation, we might even see God maturing in this story but that's a step too far to take in the time we have available today. Good for a study group some time.

Hopefully, you know the bare bones of the story. Job is rich and prosperous and good. Satan suggests to God that Job is only good because he is comfortable and could be brought to curse God if he were to encounter reversals in life. So the story is set up as a test to see if Job can be brought to curse God. Job subsequently endures major loss and trauma –not only of possessions and family but also his own health. Friends, known colloquially in our culture as 'Job's comforters' offer various solutions, as does

¹ Many people would save themselves going through a divorce or the cost of red sports cars if they recognised their mid life restlessness as this inner crisis which can only be dealt with through inner means.

Mrs Job. Job even argues with God in a magnificent row. In the end, Job comes through this life transition. He emerges a transformed man who understands better the depths of his own human psyche, who understands better the true depths of God and who understands better the relativity of the two.

In short, Job emerges from this ordeal as an individuated ego, a mature man. Part of the message of the book is that this life passage is indeed not easy but bears great fruit if we can wrestle with it and navigate the full journey. Strangely right at this moment we could see that the young soccer team down deep in a cave in Thailand are acting out in real life the deep dark exploration which is needed on such an inner journey.

This psychological interpretation of the book of Job means we will need to adjust our previous views of 'Job', 'Satan', 'God' and 'Job's friends'. 'Job' may be morally good, but in fact is, as 'Satan' suspects, heavily invested in his possessions, family and health and success. When they are stripped from him, he is indeed all at sea. Prior to his ordeal, he may even have been in danger of becoming inflated – blown up with a sense of his own self importance such that, without consciously realising it, he has thought himself to be God. (Sound familiar at all?)

So 'Job' is plunged, by the action of the trickster agent 'Satan', acting on the instructions of the true Self, (called God in this story); 'Job' is plunged into the dark night of the soul. Here he is spiritually blinded, disorientated, not knowing which way is up. He has lost his former ways of 'seeing', 'hearing' or relating in anyway to what he has known as 'God'.

'Satan' here is playing the same role as 'Satan' played in the form of a serpent in the Garden of Eden narrative. In each case Adam and Eve and now Job are being tempted in order to urge them on a journey which throws their peace and comfort upside down so they may discover more about themselves and about God, the Self, their psyche. We do not learn about ourselves while basking in paradise.

The dream imagery, the conversations with friends which follow are hallmarks of the kind of struggle one goes through in the dark night of the soul or mid-life crisis. We admonish ourselves, we rehearse arguments, we search for meaning, we engage with metaphors and ideas and images seeking our way through the darkness. It is a struggle and often we feel alone and afraid.

We can abandon the journey, seeking the comfort and apparent peace of our former understandings or we can indeed curse and abandon 'God' as many have. In this response we mistake this invitation to maturity to loss of faith and the reasonable response of an enlightened person. In our pain we reject what we think are the seductive and illusory mysteries of faith-based living, instead of wrestling with the meaning of all this change.

Job, despite his active imagination producing these Job's comforters and his dreams producing chaotic scenes which require careful interpretation and contemplation; despite this, he refuses to fall further into inflation and curse and abandon 'God'. Even though, as the book progresses, 'God' seems to be adversary rather than protector.

As I indicated before, the book builds up to an almighty row with 'God.' Through that final confrontation, 'Job' finally gets the message. He now can discern both the depth and complexity of 'God' – that 'God' is a whole, integrated entity of light and shadow.

'Job' at the same time discerns that he, 'Job', is also amazingly complex, with hidden depths he had been too afraid to explore before. He discovers that his own psyche, the Self (capital S), is the kingdom within him that Jesus will describe centuries later.

And in the process 'Job' discovers he is capable of goodness but also can be morally deficient, that he can be loving *and* harsh, that he can be brave *and* cowardly. He is at times faithful and at other times faithless.

He discovers too that he and our society are so afraid of the 'Satan' character and demonise 'Satan' because, in different forms, 'Satan' is the vehicle through which we are confronted with the deep and complex truths of ourselves.

The 'Satan' character here is the personification of the often disturbing urge towards individuation which arises in all of us. Some quash it down and end up living depressed, grey lives. Others engage and wrestle and come through to a rich position where having plumbed our own depths, we recognise that our ego needs to lie in willing subordination to the Self. Only then are we prepared to serve the totality and not to insist always on our own personal demands being met to the detriment of society.

Further becomes sufficiently mature to realise this individuation is not a goal reached once and for all, as if we have made it, but a continuous process we will follow for the rest of our lives, always renegotiating and re-recognising our true place in the world and the true nature of God. As Edward Edinger puts it: We come "to realize that there is an autonomous inner directiveness, separate from the ego and often antagonistic to it. Such an awareness is sometimes releasing and sometimes exceedingly burdensome"

Edinger also comments about Jung himself

Jung achieved such an attitude ... and that is why all who knew him could not fail to be impressed by his wisdom. Only a few days before his death he was asked by an interviewer about his notion of God. He replied in these words: "To this day God is the name by which I designate all things which cross my wilful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse."²

It is in voyages of discovery like that of Job's that we discover our true Selves and therefore the God within. Another way of putting it might be in William Blake's words on the cover of the order of service. We find that "God is the poetic genius in each of us".

Job represents those who have come to maturity and wholeness because they refuse to scuttle back to the apparent safety of their former life

AND

because in times of disorientation and turmoil they refuse to curse God and die.

Instead, such people wrestle with what it is they can learn from the frightening losses and traumas we encounter, especially those in our mid years.

In this way we find the poetic genius in each of us.

How's your mid life crisis going?

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² Edward Edinger *Ego and Archetype* Shambala, Boston & London, 1992, p. 101.