

Sermon 16 February 2020 – NRSV Cathedral Matins

**Ps 150; Job 38.1-21 and Col 1.15-20**

*May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

I wonder what was your childhood image of God, if indeed you had one? A kindly father, perhaps, or a stern schoolmaster who knew all your wrongdoings and marked your book accordingly; or perhaps, even, a thief of your happiness when your parents told you that he had taken your Granny to live with him in heaven. We have a fuller picture of God now, but however young or old we are, we can never have a complete understanding of all that God is, because our hearts and minds are too small, and his are too big.

But our picture, our image of God, is important because it affects our relationship with God, and God is essentially a God of relationships.

In the story of Job, we see how Satan, cunning as ever, seeks to attack the special relationship between Job and God. In Job's day, and in the time of Jesus, it was commonly believed that a person's suffering was indicative of his measure of guilt in the eyes of God. Conversely, health, wealth and prosperity were a sign of God's favour. Job was a godly, righteous man, and he had everything – prosperity, the respect of his community, and many children – a sure sign of God's blessing.

But Satan wanted to show that Job was righteous only for the rewards it would bring. Satan wanted to show that Job's godliness was self-serving. If Job's righteousness – or ours – is self-serving and false, how can redemption be possible, for the most righteous will be the most sinful. Satan asked God for permission to tempt Job by breaking the link between Job's righteousness and God's blessing.

Over time, Job suffered one calamity after another. He lost his wealth, his health and even his beloved children. He lost the good opinion of his wife and his friends, who all encouraged him to curse God for his undeserved misfortune. Job cried out to God in his despair, and he said *let the Almighty answer me*. [Job 31.35] In our reading today, we hear God's answer.

God answers Job by plying him with rhetorical questions, to each of which Job must plead ignorance. God does not address Job's suffering, nor Job's problem about divine justice. And yet God's questioning is an epiphany for Job. He comes to realise the vastness of God – his creative power, his majesty and his constancy. He comes to understand the divine order of things in heaven and earth. He gets the picture.

Roll on a millennium or so, and St Paul also gets the picture. He once believed that Jesus was a blasphemer, cursed by God and worthy of death. Now in his letter to the Colossians, he writes that Jesus is supreme in creation and supreme in redemption. He is the image of the invisible God, and all things were created through him *and for him*. [Col 1.16] This tells us that God in Jesus created all things – and all of us here - to have a living and ongoing relationship with him.

God in Christ is essentially a God of relationships. And so not only is everything created in Christ, but everything is held together in him. Thus, all powers, whether earthly, demonic or angelic, live each moment within the lordship of Christ.

Jesus is the exact image of the unseen God, and we are made in God's image. In God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, God himself is relational. Like God, we long, we yearn, to be connected. When God said it was not good for man to be alone, he was talking about relationship – others outside ourselves to bond with, to trust and to go to for support. We are made for relationship. Attachment is the foundation of the soul's existence. When this foundation is cracked or faulty, we will have developmental injuries, and our relationships with others, and with God, will be affected.

But we are not left injured and without healing, because Jesus *reconciles all things to him by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross*. [Col 1.20] In these last days, God has spoken to us through his Son. [Heb 1.2] In Jesus, God came to live as one of us, and the life of Jesus shows us that God identifies with us and knows us and understands us completely. The heart of God beats especially close to those wounded by trauma and hurt – he sent Jesus to bind up the broken-hearted. [Isa 61.1.] This means that we can ask God to help us

with developmental injuries and leftover childhood needs, and to fill us when we feel empty inside.

Job went through agonising pain, both physical and emotional. But he had a real relationship with God – so he cried out to him in his anger, his incomprehension and his suffering. He “let rip”, but he did not withdraw from God. And he would not curse God, for he said, *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.* [Job 19.21]

In his moment of epiphany, Job got the picture. At the end of the story he says, *My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you.* [Job 42.5]

Paul tells us that in Jesus we see the fulness of God. Jesus is the picture.

For we know that our Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.

*Sermon by Linda Barratt, Cathedral lay Reader*