

## 4 October 2015 Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Job 1 and 2

Psalm 26

Hebrews 1 and 2

Mark 10:2-16

Textweek Proper [22B/Ordinary 27B/Pentecost 19 October 4](#)

For a change today, in addition to the three readings we have just heard let's now listen to one more reading: A reading from Aesop's The Hare and the Tortois

**The Hare was once boasting of his speed before the other animals. "I have never yet been beaten," said he, "when I put forth my full speed. I challenge any one here to race with me."**

**The Tortoise said quietly, "I accept your challenge."**

**"That is a good joke," said the Hare; "I could dance round you all the way."**

**"Keep your boasting till you've beaten," answered the Tortoise. "Shall we race?"**

The story of the hare and the tortoise is probably as familiar as the Book of Job, and has some interesting parallels with the story of Job.

Like many of the biblical writers little is known of the author; Aesop was an Ancient Greek story teller credited with a number of fables now collectively known as *Aesop's Fables*. Although his existence remains uncertain and (if he ever existed) no writings by him survive, numerous tales credited to him were gathered across the centuries and in many languages in a storytelling tradition that continues to this day.

The book of Job also has questionable authorship; ascribed by Jewish tradition to Moses, it is generally agreed by scholars that the book comes from the period between the 7th and 4th centuries BCE, with the 6th century as the most likely date. The anonymous author was almost certainly an Israelite, although the story is set outside Israel, in southern Edom or northern Arabia.

The story from Job contains a dialogue between "the Lord" and "Satan"; the story from Aesop, a dialogue between "the Hare" and "the Tortoise". Staying, for a moment, with the Aesop story, do we actually think or believe that the dialogue between the hare and the tortoise actually took place?

Obviously the answer is no; we know the dialogue didn't actually take place, and yet we are also able to appreciate, to believe in that which the dialogue seeks to illuminate.

The story from Job, for some of us, is of that same order; and yet a majority of Christians actually think that the dialogue, and the events narrated in the book, actually did take place.

Even among those who more fully appreciate the genre of myth there is still a belief in "*the heavenly beings*" and they see both "the Lord" and "Satan" as 'beings' that interact in a very human way.

If we applied the same intellectual development of such beliefs to the Aesop story then "the Lord" and "Satan" would be "Hare" and "Tortoise"; and no doubt we would now be worshipping Aesop as a prophet, or even as a Christ figure that speaks and reveals the wisdom of the 'Hare' for all who believe.

The wisdom, insights and the real value of the Scriptures are all distorted when we ascribe to them a context that is both primitive and childish.

When Christ teaches "*Suffer the little children to come unto Me*", we are being called to drop the safety blanket that distorts the 'Word' and to approach the Divine with an open mind and a sense of wonder, seeking to discover what we might be when we grow up.

So briefly, to the actual readings set for today.

The Book of Job does give us a somewhat long-winded look at the question of why do bad things happen to good people; and we will be thrown off course if we engage this question, and others like it, with a retained reference point of "the Lord" and "Satan" as the operational "*heavenly beings*"

Bad things do not happen because the tortoise tempts me and the hare has given me free will.

We also have to reread the story without a focus on the individuality of Job, and see his character as representative of humanity in its wholeness.

Karma is not balanced to the individual, if it was our selfishness would ensure we only do good; however, as we are learning from global warming our actions do contribute to the karma of the whole.

As we move beyond a literal individuality, we see in the story of Job a Christ-like figure, a figure who had integrity with the Divine, and yet who suffers greatly; and a suffering to the point of despair; "my God my God, why have you forsaken me?"

However, in Job, as in Christ, there is a movement beyond that of victim, and at the end of the story Job is restored to health, riches and family, and lives to see his children to the fourth generation; he finds resurrection.

Aesop used the hare and the tortoise to illustrate a truth; so too the writer of the fable of Job has given us a gospel narrative that predates the revelation of Christ.

The second reading from Hebrews begins with "*Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.*"

Both Paul and the writer of Hebrews were seeking to convey that which they understood in relation to Christ's teaching, and depending on how we read the letter it can reinforce the hare and tortoise understanding of earlier primitive religious writers.

The son mentioned in the opening lines, "*in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son*", could be interpreted as the offspring of the Hare who has been given voice. however the same writer also refers to Christ as "pioneer" or "forerunner", "priest" and "high priest"; and that suggests that they were, as we are, still wrestling with the place of Christ in the cosmic scheme of things.

As with the Book of Job, when we take the focus off the literal actuality of Christ, we find a universal icon of humanity represented both in the person of Christ and so too in the teachings of Christ; it is not about him, rather he is revealing us to ourselves; and that creates a completely new reading to the orthodox primitive version. reflection on this reading leads us into the question; are we "*the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being?*"

That's enough for us to think about today, but let's quickly address the issue of 'divorce' as per the gospel reading.

Divorce in the first century was a generally accepted part of life, both among Jews and perhaps more so within wider Greco-Roman culture, and therefore Mark's original readers probably found Jesus' uncompromising statements about divorce and remarriage as challenging and counter-cultural as we do today.

And it is that *counter-cultural* nature that asks us to look beyond our cultural context for understanding.

How many marriages have you encountered where the couple realized themselves as 'one flesh', and what would that look like?

A fullness of male and female realized in one flesh, no dominant partner, no dependent partner, no possessive partner, no parent/child relationship, but one flesh.

The perpetuation of unhealthy, even abusive, marriages has very much been affirmed by the primitive understanding of this text; perhaps what is being illustrated here is that there is another realization of marriage, one that is counter-cultural and yet to be realized....

Hopefully, we are left today with much to think about.

Peter Humphris