

# A Month of Sundays October 2024



Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

# Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2024

## Call to worship

When we don't have all the answers,  
we can still be faithful.  
When everything is going wrong,  
we can still be faithful.  
When we have no words to express our pain,  
we can still be faithful.  
When others let us down,  
we can still be faithful,  
for God remains faithful to us.

## Bible reading: Job 1:1, 2:1-10

1 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

2 On another day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the Lord, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it."

<sup>3</sup> 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. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason."

<sup>4</sup> "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. <sup>5</sup> But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."

<sup>6</sup> The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life."

<sup>7</sup> So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. <sup>8</sup> Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.

<sup>9</sup> His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"

<sup>10</sup> He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

## Hymn Stf 36: There's a quiet understanding

- 1        There's a quiet understanding  
          when we're gathered in the Spirit,  
          it's a promise that he gives us,  
          when we gather in his name.  
          There's a love we feel in Jesus,  
          there's a manna that he feeds us,  
          it's a promise that he gives us,  
          when we gather in his name.
  
- 2        And we know when we're together,  
          sharing love and understanding,  
          that our brothers and our sisters  
          feel the oneness that he brings.  
          Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jesus,  
          for the way you love and feed us,  
          for the many ways you lead us;  
          thank you, thank you, Lord;  
          thank you, thank you, Lord.

## **Prayers of praise and thanksgiving**

Creator of the world, thank you for coming to us in your Son Jesus.

Thank you that you are with us in our deepest darkness and suffering, even when we cannot see you or understand.

You are a God who walks alongside us in our pain.

We are grateful.

Amen.

## **Reflection**

If someone who knew nothing about the Christian faith heard the passage from Job today, what would they make of it? Hearing how God agreed that Satan could torture a good man, how many questions would that raise? We can feel under pressure to have all the answers, but it is only by looking more deeply into the whole biblical story that we can even try to understand our awesome God.

Like a Shakespearean play, the book of Job contains 'truth' without being factual. It carries a message in a dramatic form to teach us about God and about ourselves. Its lesson is timeless: disasters and suffering can and do happen to us, even in our modern age when we might pretend to be in control through our technology. How must God feel when he looks at his beautiful world? We are still affected in so many ways by the pandemic of 2020. Wars, floods and earthquakes tear lives apart somewhere in his world each day. God understood Job's suffering.

To counter the troubles of our world, the good news of the New Testament is that through Jesus, God comes alongside us and shares our suffering in a way that we cannot fully understand, because that is the nature of faith.

The inclusion of Job's challenging story does blow apart the theory that suffering is always a result of our sin. It also makes a rather laboured point of showing how not to come alongside others in their troubles, making a good case for listening with empathy, rather than wearing down with judgement. The book as a whole also offers reassurance that, eventually, there will be blessings equal to our losses. Our challenge, through all that life brings, is to trust God more than we can understand him.

## **Prayer**

O God, help those who feel uncomfortable in their present situation, job or church.

Help them discern when it's time to stick at it and when it's time to get out, when to wait and when to act.

Show them what they can do to make their current situation more bearable.

Turn a restless experience into a creative one.

Guide those who are contemplating a career change –  
or are being forced into one by poor health or redundancy.

Be their inspiration in making a good change,  
giving them courage in the face of the unknown.

And turn even their unfortunate choices to good ends. Amen.

## **Say the Lord's Prayer**

## **A sending out prayer**

Bear with me, O Lord,  
as I try to live for you in all I do.  
Help me to keep you in my heart and mind and to walk in faithfulness to you.  
As I follow your way,  
Lord, in your mercy, help me  
to keep my feet on the ground,  
so that wherever I find myself  
I will bless you. Amen.

## Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2024

### Call to worship

Our ever-present God,  
we pray that as we worship  
you will reveal yourself to us.  
By your grace forgive us  
and call us back to you when we are  
lost. In the fire of your Holy Spirit, warm  
us, by the wind of your Spirit, move us,  
with the love of Jesus, fill us. **Amen.**

### Bible reading: Job 23:1-9, 16-17

23 Then Job replied:

<sup>2</sup> “Even today my complaint is bitter;  
his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning.

<sup>3</sup> If only I knew where to find him;  
if only I could go to his dwelling!

<sup>4</sup> I would state my case before him  
and fill my mouth with arguments.

<sup>5</sup> I would find out what he would answer me,  
and consider what he would say to me.

<sup>6</sup> Would he vigorously oppose me?  
No, he would not press charges against me.

<sup>7</sup> There the upright can establish their innocence before him,  
and there I would be delivered forever from my judge.

<sup>8</sup> “But if I go to the east, he is not there;  
if I go to the west, I do not find him.

<sup>9</sup> When he is at work in the north, I do not see him;  
when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him.

<sup>16</sup> God has made my heart faint;  
the Almighty has terrified me.

<sup>17</sup> Yet I am not silenced by the darkness,  
by the thick darkness that covers my face.

### Reflection

Job is not the only person to have ever cried out, ‘Where are you God?’ It’s what people say when they are overwhelmed by troubles – even if they claim not to believe in God. They may even ask ‘What did I do to deserve this?’, which may be a subconscious acknowledgement of the ancient story of Job’s claim to innocence. To read of Job’s problems should put our own into perspective, but that is no consolation when darkness has overcome us. Last week marked World Mental Health Day (10 October). Issues of mental health have been increasingly highlighted over recent years, with the Covid lockdowns exacerbating many longstanding problems. What can we, as

people of faith, offer to those who are struggling to make sense of life and to those who are asking the big questions?

While Job feels that God is hidden from him, as the writer of Hebrews assures us, we cannot hide from God and eventually Job does have his conversation with God, who restores him. Being listened to plays a huge role in finding a way out of the dark times. 'It's good to talk' is an advertising slogan with roots in encouraging the sharing of problems and, more recently, ITV has run a campaign 'Britain Get Talking'

It's okay to 'be a Job' and to speak out our complaints against the world and against God. Jesus knew about suffering, about being a refugee, vilified, persecuted, arrested, tortured, executed. He went off alone to pray: he needed to talk to his Father. Where do you seek God in your tough times?

In church life, there is often a lot of talking but not so much genuine sharing that could open the path to help and healing. There will be times when confession and repentance are appropriate. In other cases, there may need to be forgiveness of those causing the hurt. As we create safe spaces for truly listening, where God can be challenged and sought, we can trust in Christ's mercy and grace, offering what we can, while signposting to additional resources for support.

## **Hymn StF 544: As the deer pants**

1 As the deer pants for the water,  
so my soul longs after you.  
You alone are my heart's desire  
and I long to worship you.

*You alone are my strength, my shield,  
to you alone may my spirit yield.  
You alone are my heart's desire  
and I long to worship you.*

2 I want you more than gold or silver,  
only you can satisfy.  
You alone are the real joy-giver  
and the apple of my eye.

3 You're my friend and you are my brother,  
even though you are a king.  
I love you more than any other,  
so much more than anything.

Martin J. Nystrom (b.  
1956) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition,  
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## **Prayer of confession**

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed. We have doubted your goodness, questioned your justice and ignored your will. We have been impatient with your timing and ungrateful for your blessings. We have been selfish and proud, harsh and unforgiving, greedy and wasteful. Forgive us, O God. Amen.

## **Say the Lord's Prayer**

Where can wisdom be found?  
And where is the source of understanding?  
**Alone God understands the way to it,  
and alone God knows its source.**  
God says to us:  
The fear of the Lord is wisdom  
**and to turn from evil is understanding.**

*(from Job 28)*

How lovely is your dwelling-place O God!  
**My soul yearns for the courts of the Lord.**  
**My heart and flesh cry out for the**  
**living God.**

Even the sparrow finds a home  
and the swallow a nest:

**Blessed are those who dwell in your house,**  
**They are ever praising you.**

## **A sending out prayer**

On each day of the week,  
look for God, and find him:  
in your friends,  
in your family,  
in the people you pass by,  
in your quiet times,  
in laughter,  
in the natural world;  
for he is everywhere,  
and look inside yourself  
for he is there! Amen.

# Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2024

## A call to worship

Who created the seas? God did!  
Who created rainbows? God did!  
Who created snails, whales and wolves? God did!  
Who created rain, sunshine and snow? God did!  
Who have we come to worship? Our creator God.

## Hymn Stf 20: Be still

- 1 Be still,  
for the presence of the Lord,  
the Holy One, is here;  
come bow before him now  
with reverence and fear:  
in him no sin is found —  
we stand on holy ground.  
Be still,  
for the presence of the Lord,  
the Holy One, is here.
  
- 2 Be still,  
for the glory of the Lord  
is shining all around;  
he burns with holy fire,  
with splendour he is crowned:  
how awesome is the sight —  
our radiant King of light!  
Be still,  
for the glory of the Lord  
is shining all around.
  
- 3 Be still,  
for the power of the Lord  
is moving in this place;  
he comes to cleanse and heal,  
to minister his grace:  
no work too hard for him —  
in faith receive from him.  
Be still,  
for the power of the Lord  
is moving in this place.

David J. Evans (b. 1957)

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## A prayer of adoration

Glorious God, we praise you and we adore you for your amazing deeds, wonderful works and marvellous wisdom. You created the heavens and the earth and sustain all life. You are the ruler of the storm and the sea, and the provider of all our needs. You are the high priest of the new covenant, and the mediator of all grace. You are the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and the friend of sinners. You are worthy of all praise and deserving of all adoration.

**Amen.**

## Say the Lord's Prayer

### Bible reading: Job 38:1-7, 34-41

#### The Lord Speaks

38 Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said:

<sup>2</sup> “Who is this that obscures my plans  
with words without knowledge?

<sup>3</sup> Brace yourself like a man;  
I will question you,  
and you shall answer me.

<sup>4</sup> “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?  
Tell me, if you understand.

<sup>5</sup> Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!  
Who stretched a measuring line across it?

<sup>6</sup> On what were its footings set,  
or who laid its cornerstone—

<sup>7</sup> while the morning stars sang together  
and all the angels shouted for joy?

<sup>34</sup> “Can you raise your voice to the clouds  
and cover yourself with a flood of water?

<sup>35</sup> Do you send the lightning bolts on their way?  
Do they report to you, ‘Here we are’?

<sup>36</sup> Who gives the ibis wisdom  
or gives the rooster understanding?

<sup>37</sup> Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?  
Who can tip over the water jars of the heavens

<sup>38</sup> when the dust becomes hard  
and the clods of earth stick together?

<sup>39</sup> “Do you hunt the prey for the lioness  
and satisfy the hunger of the lions

<sup>40</sup> when they crouch in their dens  
or lie in wait in a thicket?

<sup>41</sup> Who provides food for the raven  
when its young cry out to God  
and wander about for lack of food?

## Reflection

The Narnia series of books by CS Lewis introduce us to the Jesus-figure, Aslan. The cleverness of this analogy becomes more apparent as you read through the series, but in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, where Susan and Lucy first meet him, Aslan is introduced as the Great Lion. Susan is amazed and scared. She'd thought he was a man. She asks how a lion could be safe. Mr Beaver explains that he is most definitely not safe. But he is good.

It feels as if Lewis had been reading Job when he wrote this. Because in today's Old Testament passage we see the full force of who God is in relation to mere mortals.

In portraying Aslan as a lion, Lewis points us towards the otherness of God. The parts of him that we will never fully comprehend. The parts of God that aren't safe. What is safe about a lion? Perhaps our concept of God has become too safe. After all, it's easier to relate to Jesus as the friend that he is and God as our Father than to God's otherness. Christianity is founded on relationship, on our being God's children. But can that sometimes lead us away from remembering the greatness of God? Are we in danger of trying to make God our 'mate' rather than acknowledging his greatness and complete otherness? How often are we tempted to 'make God in our own image' rather than allowing him to be the God that he is, even if we don't like it?



We might like to rewrite the book of Job, to have God's intervention here as showing compassion and care, taking Job in his arms to comfort him. But, the reality is, that instead we hear God effectively saying, 'Job, look around you. This is who I am.' Because God is who he is, he has every right to act in the way that he does. He is the one who created not just atoms and cuddly creatures, plankton and billions of stars but also fierce beasts, volcanoes, hurricanes and storms. We cannot fathom God. And nor should we try. Just like a child sometimes has to acquiesce to the parent who says: 'Because I say so!', so do we need to bow to the God of the universe. Authority figures may not be popular in our culture, but there are times when we just have to accept that they are there. This is what Job was learning when God spoke to him out of the storm. God is not tame. He is not safe. God is.

But Job's story isn't the end of the story, as we know. Let's jump forwards to our Gospel reading and here, again, we see a God that we cannot truly comprehend. We see God in Jesus. But we don't see the majesty this time. We don't see the glory. At least, we don't see it where we would look for earthly glory. We would look in the boardroom, in the parliament buildings, with the Hollywood greats and the billionaires. But God has baffled us again. In our Gospel reading we hear Jesus telling his disciples: 'The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many'. Here, again, we need to recognise the unfathomability of God. The one who, in Graham Kendrick's words 'flung stars into space' is now surrendering 'to cruel nails'. Surely, no sane person who wanted to create a god-figure would allow them to suffer and die? What sort of God is that? What sort of God indeed. Only the God that we worship.

### **A prayer of intercession**

Loving God, we pray for the humble in our world

Loving God, we pray for the humble in our world, those who have not chosen their position in society:

- for children sold into slavery or prostitution;
- for women living in subservience because of their traditional culture;
- for those whose work is underpaid and undervalued;
- for those who are unemployed;
- for those who do the dirtiest jobs – hospital, and street, cleaners, refuse collectors;
- for ...

Lord, give them hope, and so work in our world by the power of the Holy Spirit, that the dignity of ordinary human beings may be valued, oppression overcome, and the yoke of injustice broken.

We pray for those highly exalted in our world, those who hold the reins of power:

- for the leaders and members of national governments;
- for the managing directors and executives of multi-national companies;
- for the staff of the World Bank, the IMF, and all international economic agencies;
- for the leaders of the different groupings of the world faiths;
- for ...

Lord, help them to understand the effects of their policies. Grant them true wisdom in the decisions that they have to make, and grant them true humility of heart.

We pray for those who have positively chosen the way of humility:

- for those who have put others first, parents caring for children, children caring for parents;
- for teachers and nurses, police officers and social workers, and all who simply try to do the best job they can for the sake of others and the good of their community;
- for aid workers overseas, whose concern is the wellbeing of often starving and dispossessed people;
- for ...

Grant, Lord, that they may know your love, receive your strength, and rest in your peace. Uphold them in times of stress and self-doubt, give them patient endurance, and the knowledge that are

doing your will.  
Amen.

## A sending out prayer

Go with God and search for his wonders.  
Go with God and look for his glory.  
Go with God to proclaim his greatness.  
Go with God as your Lord and your friend.  
Amen.

# Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2024

## A gathering prayer

Come, come, come to meet your amazing God.  
Leave your preconceptions behind.  
Come, come, come to seek and to find.  
Come to meet the Lord of the universe.  
Come, come, come to worship the One True God. Amen.

## Bible reading: Job 42:1-6, 10-17

42 Then Job replied to the Lord:

- <sup>2</sup> "I know that you can do all things;  
no purpose of yours can be thwarted.  
<sup>3</sup> You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'  
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,  
things too wonderful for me to know.  
<sup>4</sup> "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak;  
I will question you,  
and you shall answer me.'  
<sup>5</sup> My ears had heard of you  
but now my eyes have seen you.  
<sup>6</sup> Therefore I despise myself  
and repent in dust and ashes."

<sup>10</sup> After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. <sup>11</sup> All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.

<sup>12</sup> The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. <sup>13</sup> And he also had seven sons and three daughters. <sup>14</sup> The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. <sup>15</sup> Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.

<sup>16</sup> After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. <sup>17</sup> And so Job died, an old man and full of years.

## Reflection

- What is your idea of God?
- Is it the same when life is going well and when life is painful and difficult?

- Does our perception of God stay static, or should it be growing and changing daily?
  - How much does what I first knew of God matter now?
  - And how much of what I will know of him tomorrow is related to what I know of him today?
  - Is how we perceive God related also to how much of himself he is prepared to reveal to us at any one time?
  - Does he take us from where we are today and bring us to a new understanding of him only when we are ready?
  - If so, how do we get ourselves to the point when we are ready for more of him?
  - Is it up to us to make ourselves open and ready for new things of God, or is it only in his timing?
  - Does this revelation come in the high moments of life or in the depths of despair?
- There are so many more questions we could ask...but maybe, this side of eternity, we will never truly know the answer.

It is intriguing that Job learnt more of God in the midst of his pain than when his life was going well. Is this, in fact, the story of Job? That God wanted him to know more; God sought a deeper relationship with Job – God wanted Job to know him better, but Job wasn't open to it until he was in a desperate place. Not that this should make us long for suffering so that we can learn more of God. That would be perverse. And yet, there seems to be a sense that we can use Job's example to learn how to 'suffer well'.

When life is hard, painful, almost intolerable even, it is easy to turn our back on God, or, at best, to rely on the God we thought we knew. There is something deep in the heart of Job's story that invites us to use adversity as a stepping stone to find more of God. Just as the true nature of God was revealed on the cross, so our deepest darkness can lead us deeper into the heart of our suffering God – a God who knows what it is to suffer with us; a God who yearns to reveal more of himself to us while holding us in his comforting arms. Job's friends urged him to turn away from God to make himself feel better. Clinging on to a God who seemed to have turned against him seemed like lunacy. But Job was shrewder than that. He knew that, somewhere, God had not brought this suffering upon him.

What Job didn't do at first was recognise that God is distinctly other – he has his own ways, his own reasons. Sometimes he lets us see what he's doing and sometimes he doesn't. There are times when all we can do is cling on by our fingertips, trusting that he is there somewhere. As a line from the hymn 'Rock of Ages' says: 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.' And it is in these moments that we often discover that God is not the God we thought he was. He may well also not be the God that we hope he is. But he is and will be the God that we need for that moment. He is the God who holds the universe in his hand and the God who holds us. The God who can see far beyond what we can see or understand. The God who knows how much closer to him we can become if we choose to look more closely to him.

As Job discovered, the God who chooses to deal with humanity is not a human. He is not made from human hands or flights of fancy, but the creator of the universe who knows and sees far beyond what we can see. He holds everything securely, even in his otherness. It was only when Job saw who God really was that he truly began to see that he would never understand. But it didn't matter because God did understand, and God is God. No matter what. And once we understand that for ourselves, our Christian journey may not necessarily be any easier, but our relationship with God will deepen. God cannot be made in our image, but the more we let God be God, the more like him we will surely become.

## **Hymn StF 345: And can it be**

- 1       And can it be that I should gain  
          an interest in the Saviour's blood?  
          Died he for me, who caused his pain?  
          For me, who him to death pursued?  
          Amazing love! How can it be  
          that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

- 2 'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
to sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
let angel minds enquire no more.
- 3 He left his Father's throne above —  
so free, so infinite his grace —  
emptied himself of all but love,  
and bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
for, O my God, it found out me!
- 4 Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
thine eye diffused a quickening ray —  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
my chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.
- 5 No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!  
Alive in him, my living Head,  
and clothed in righteousness divine,  
bold I approach the eternal throne,  
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)  
Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 345

## Prayers of intercession

Please bring healing  
God of all life and all goodness,  
we entrust to you those places where all is not well –  
places where there is deep seated hatred and mistrust.  
We pray especially for Jerusalem;  
for the leaders and people of Israel and Palestine; and are threatened by, the brutality of prejudice.  
We pray for Ukraine and all countries being bombed and destroyed  
because of the ideology of other powers and leaders;  
for all prisoners and casualties of war.  
Where all is not well,  
Lord Jesus, please bring hope  
**please bring healing. Amen.**  
We pray for all those who are victimised  
for their ethnicity, their religion, their sexuality;  
for those imprisoned for speaking out  
and protesting against corruption –

Lord Jesus, please bring hope  
**please bring healing. Amen.**  
We pray for those places where lives are being lost  
to extreme temperatures, to floods and to drought –  
We pray for places where children are starving  
Where all is not well,  
Lord Jesus, please bring hope  
**please bring healing. Amen.**

And we pray for our church  
and the communities we serve;  
we pray for one another;  
for our families;  
for our neighbours, our friends;  
for all who today feel sad, frightened or alone.  
Where all is not well,  
Lord Jesus, please bring hope  
**please bring healing. Amen.**

## **Say the Lord's Prayer**

### **A sending out prayer**

Go with God and search for his wonders.

Go with God and look for his glory.

Go with God to proclaim his greatness.

Go with God as your Lord and your friend.

Amen.