

**SERMON – 22/8/21**  
**“It's God's World”**

Job 38:1-12 and 42:1-6

“Job, have you ever in all your life commanded a day to dawn?” (Job 38:12)

When the word 'Stewardship' is used in church, people often immediately jump to the conclusion that there is an appeal for money for church funds coming right up. Well, as we begin this year's Stewardship Season, let me disabuse you of that assumption straight away – we are going to be focussing over the next few weeks on the question of our stewardship of God's Creation, that is to say how we each play our part in looking after this wonderful world in which we live, and in actual fact, by the time we have finished you may well be wishing that I had stuck to questions of finance, which are altogether more straightforward.

In the run-up to the COP26 Climate Conference in Glasgow at the beginning of November we will be hearing a great deal over the coming months about the environmental crisis that is unfolding across the planet and which, if some are to be believed, threatens to make the challenges brought about by the Covid pandemic look like a walk in the park in comparison. As Christians, we need to come at environmental questions from a very particular perspective, namely that we are not just needing to look after the planet in a self-interested way but that we are called by God to be stewards, good stewards, of His precious handiwork. As we wrestle with the human fallout from increasingly ferocious wildfires and droughts and floods and hurricanes which may well be connected to our irreversible use of fossil fuels over the last couple of hundred years there are no simple answers but we need to begin by highlighting the simple fact that when it comes right down to it this is first God's world not ours.

Perhaps some of you have read Douglas Adams' book *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. In it, the scientists build a super computer in order to come up with the ultimate answer to questions about the meaning of life, the universe and everything. After several million years of computation, it comes up with the answer - “You're not going to like it,” the computer declares to the scientists. But they tell it to proceed and print out the long-awaited answer. And the answer is: Forty-two.

Naturally the scientists are disappointed with the simplicity of the answer – it doesn't satisfy them. So they build another computer and task it with finding out, “If the ultimate answer to life, the universe and everything is 42, then what is the ultimate question?” Again, aeons pass before a report is ready for the scientists, but finally the print out comes – here is the ultimate question: “What is six times eight?” Of course the astute among you will notice that the question and the answer don't actually tally, because six times eight is not in fact forty-two.

Now if you have ever fought your way right through the Book of Job (and rather strangely given what I have just been saying, it runs to 42 chapters) you will know that Job and his friends spend a very long time indeed wrestling with ultimate questions, and in particular the question of human suffering. Job is coming at the question 'Why?' from the perspective of someone who is actually suffering (suffering unspeakably, in fact); the other three are speaking rather more theoretically and not surprisingly they end up talking a lot of hot air. Finally, though, after pages and pages of human words, God speaks directly to Job, although when He speaks it is not to answer the question 'Why?' which Job longs to understand. Instead, the Lord asks and answers a completely different series of questions, the first of which we read this morning.

There *is* no neat and tidy answer, and yet curiously what God says helps Job begin to address his problems in a better and deeper way, by abandoning himself completely into God's hands in awe and wonder. If you are looking for a simple answer to the meaning of life, then let me tell you – Douglas Adams is right, the answer is 42 – but that won't do you a blind bit of good because, despite its simplicity, it is almost certainly not the answer to the question you are asking today. But if you are looking to work through whatever struggles you may be wrestling with and if you are serious about wanting to be a good steward of creation, then come with me to look at some of the things that come out of the final chapters of Job.

Firstly, when as individuals we are in the throes of despair or suffering we sometimes get beyond asking questions of God and simply conclude that because of the silence there can be no God at all. And if we look at the global reaction and response to the climate emergency it is certainly the case that for many God simply does not have a place in the discussion. What the Lord says to Job in the final chapters of the book (from which we read the

tinest excerpt this morning) is it is arrogant of human beings to write God out of the picture. “Were you there, [Job], when I made the world? If you know so much, tell me about it... Who laid the cornerstone of the world?” (Job 38:4,6) The questions God asks should make us pause and take stock: “Job, have you ever in all your life commanded a day to dawn?” (Job 38:12)

This is a theme that the apostle Paul takes up at the opening of the case he makes in his Letter to the Romans: “Ever since God created the world, His invisible qualities, both His eternal power and His divine nature, have been clearly see; they are perceived in the things that God has made. So people have no excuse at all! They know God but they do not give Him the honour that belongs to Him nor do they thank Him. Instead their thoughts have become complete nonsense and their empty minds are filled with darkness.” (Romans 1:20-21) The point is this: we often say that God is silent when we come to Him with all our questions and complaints and yet does He not speak through every crashing wave of the sea, every crag and mountain-top, every newborn creature, every sunset or thunderstorm? “Pause a moment, Job, and listen; consider the wonderful things God does.” (Job 37:14) In the face of any global crisis the question is not so much 'Why is God silent?' but rather 'Why are we do deaf?'

Secondly, when faced with intractable problems we sometimes get so caught up with a particular line of thinking that we cannot see that there may be another way of approaching the problem altogether, as the buzz phrase goes, by thinking 'out of the box'. Humbly, perhaps we need to suggest in the context of COP26, that human beings need to take much more seriously than we do the reality that this is God's world.

“Remember how great is God's power,” says the last of the teachers who tries to help Job in his suffering. “He is the greatest teacher of all. No-one can tell God what to do or accuse Him of doing evil.” (Job 36:22-23) However inexplicable our situation may seem to us and however desperate we may be to know the reason for it, if we consider the greatness of God and His unsearchable wisdom, perhaps we should be quicker to ask what God wants us to learn from all this than we are to demand an answer to the question Why are we in the mess we are in? That is not an easy shift of thinking to make but given that there are no simplistic answers (other than 42, of course) it will be much more profitable to wait humbly upon God and to be open to where He may be leading us.

That is the point Job reaches at the end of the book, and we caught a glimpse of that in the verses we read from chapter 42. He recognises and acknowledges his own arrogance: “I talked about things I did not understand, about marvels too great for me to know. In the past I knew only what others had told me but now I have seen you with my own eyes.” (Job 42:3,5) That's the place to which each one of us has to come – recognising our need of a Saviour and enthroning Jesus as Lord over all. And that is also the place humanity as a whole *has* to come to if we are to see real progress in our time that will benefit the most vulnerable in our world now and in the generations to come. It is there that Job reaches the point of transformation, the place from which the only way is up: “I am ashamed of all I have said,” he says, “and I repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:6)

I am very glad that COP26 is happening and I'm sure that much will be achieved in Glasgow later in the year. But don't let's kid ourselves that we are going to find the magic answer – I'm fairly sure it's not forty-two! In the midst of all the talking, what if we just shut up for a moment and let God be God? At the end of the day, it's God's World. We are called to be good stewards of it. Let Jesus be Lord of your life for that is where God's Kingdom begins to take hold.