

(B5) SUNDAY 5 OF THE YEAR

(FEBRUARY 7TH, 2021)

Readings: Job 7: 1 – 7; Ps. 146(147): 1 – 6; 1 Corinthians 9: 16 – 23; Mark 1: 29 – 39.

We've been hearing Mark's Gospel for five weeks now, and, although we haven't reached the end of the first chapter, we've already heard three healing stories – including today of *all who were sick and those who were possessed by devils*. There's another healing story next Sunday – this time of a man suffering from “leprosy”. When, in the middle of June, we start again on the reading of Mark's Gospel we'll have missed another three healings – the paralyzed man whose friends let him down through a hole in the roof (2:1 – 12), the man with a withered hand (3:1 – 6), and a crowd of sick and demon-possessed people (3:7 – 12). That's a total of six stories in two-and-a-half chapters. Think for a moment that you'd heard all this read out as a single proclamation of Mark's Gospel (which, I suppose, is how it was first heard). It would strike you – as Mark no doubt intended that it should – that the ministry of Jesus was a demonstration of great power. It was in fact the putting into powerful action of the words with which his ministry began: *The kingdom of God is close at hand*. As you've probably heard before, the word we translate “kingdom” doesn't mean a place or a state, like the United Kingdom, it means the royal rule – God's sovereign authority over all that he creates.

The Book of Job, from which today's Old Testament reading comes, is a complex literary creation, but at its heart it's the story of a man whose suffering tests his faith in this sovereign rule of God. His suffering is made worse by the unhelpful advice his so-called friends give him, but he just manages to hold on to his faith – hold on enough for him to realize that the God whose purposes he cannot understand is the ruler of all.

Job's description of his present state – *Lying in bed I wonder “When will it be day?” Risen I think, “How slowly evening comes!”* – will find an echo in the minds and hearts of many people during this time of global suffering. “Where (we may find ourselves asking), where is God in all this pain and sorrow?” Job's experience allowed him to catch a glimpse of the truth: but Christians can have greater certainty than Job. For we have the person of Jesus to contemplate – the Jesus who taught and demonstrated the sovereign rule of God, and in sharing our human condition, even to death, embodied trust in the God who is not only Creator but Father of us all.