

**SERMON: 2018/10/07** (20th Sunday aft. Pentecost, Yr. B - Track 1) - *Job* 1:1,2:1-10; *Psalms* 26; *Hebrews* 1:1-4; 2:5-12 & *Mark* 10:17-31\_BTR

[Invite children to the front.]

There is a man in the Bible called, Job.

And he lived in the land of Uz.

He 'was blameless and upright' [1:1,8 & 2:3] and very wealthy too: we're told that he had seven thousand sheep(!), and to look after them all he had seven sons: [1:2-3].

Now in Heaven there was an evil angel called Satan, and He said to God: people only love you when you're generous. (Which is another way of saying, "they don't really love you at all 'deep down.'") But God said, "That's not true of everyone; that's not true of those who really understand who I. AM."

So, Satan said: "Ok, let's play a game - a test - to find out who is right. I know, let's play it on Job."

Well, one day, some robbers came out from the desert - nomads, camel-riders: the "Sabeans."

And they stole half of *all* of Job's things and he was very upset. But before he could cry out, another gang came, the "Chaldeans," and they stole everything else.

It was a terrible shock.

Now, he had *nothing!*

Only what he was wearing.

But Job was a very thoughtful, reasonable person - a philosopher, you might say; and he told himself: "Well, they were just *things* after all. I came into the world without them, naked - as a baby - we all did - without any belongings, no toys or clothes or computer-games - and when I die I can't take them with me, so I can't be angry that they've been taken away from me prematurely. They were, after all, just (temporarily) borrowed from God. Blessed be the LORD!", he shouted. [1:21] Job said that because he loved God, you see.

And God said to Satan: "See! I told you. Some people love me because of who I am, not just for what I do."

But Satan wasn't finished yet:

And one day whilst Job's sons were eating dinner together, Satan made the roof fall on their heads!

"Splat!"

Poor old Job.

He wept (tears), [16:16] and tore his shirt, [1:20] (the only thing he still owned). But still he refused to stop loving God: [1:22].

Satan was so mad!

He thought to himself, "I know, I'll make Job sick."

And great big, oozing pimples appeared all over Job's body: [2:7].

And his breath was so bad that his wife wouldn't kiss him; and the neighbors' children made fun of him and called him names: [19:17-18].

But still Job kept on loving God.

Finally, some of Job's best friends came to see him.

They sat with him - on the ground - for *seven* days and *seven* nights. [2:13]

And they said to him, "You must have done something wrong: all this bad stuff that has happened to you is a punishment."

But Job knew that they were wrong.

"Sometimes these things just happen," he replied. "Good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. And the other way round too!" [See: 21:7ff]

And this is how God has chosen for the world to be:

*Full* of potential - for the things we love and the things we hate. You can't have one without the other: [Mt. 5:45b]

And at the end of the story, Job sacrificed *seven* bulls and *seven* goats. [42:8]

Why?

Because he still loved God.

Let's pray: Father God, help us, by Your Holy Spirit, to love you not just when you are generous to us and bless us, but also when things don't work out how we would like; to love you because of who you are: '*perfect*' [Deut. 32:4; Ps. 18:30; Mt. 5:48], *holy, ageless, tireless*, in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

This is *the* question of our time - of our species.

We all ask it at some time or another in one way or another.

And, reflecting on this weekend's events, likely it is at the very forefront of your mind today:

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

What must anyone do to inherit eternal life?"

According to Elon Musk, we needn't do anything.

Not you and I, that is:

residents in the heartland; little people.

"Norms."

"Breeders."[\[n.1\]](#)

"Average joes."

"The great unwashed."

No, he says that we should trust in the "eggheads" of Silicon Valley and in their technology; in their *innovation* and ingenuity.

'Reportedly', you see, along with others at Apple and Google, he is 'spending millions to establish escape routes from [death]', 'pouring cash into a *virtual* contingency plan.'[\[n.2\]](#)

The idea, it seems, and they believe in it, say they who've interview them, with 'religious zeal', is 'to save the world... "[by] get[ting] our brains uploaded into the Cloud."[\[n.3\]](#)

As one filthy-rich tech-genius put it in an interview with *The New Yorker*: "'We need to level up humans'" "'[And] I'd love that!'"[\[n.4\]](#)

Alternatively, if you have lots of money to burn, you can have yourself cryogenically frozen. Hundreds of Americans already have, apparently; including a teenage girl who convinced her grandparents to pay for the procedure: she explains - and I quote - 'I have been asked to explain why I want this unusual thing done. I'm only 14 years old and I don't want to die, but I know I am going to. I think being cryo-preserved gives me a chance to be...woken up, even in hundreds of years' time.'[\[n.5\]](#)

Or, if you're Michael Jackson, you can have yourself "plastinated."

Doesn't that sound appealing?

To be preserved as an adult-sized doll, and why?

In the hope that in the future people will have the ability to reverse the process and resurrect you.[\[n.6\]](#)

I *hate* these ideas.

And not because I'm a brooding, cynical Luddite (- although maybe I am):

Whether Musk, for example, is right about the inevitability of what he terms "The Merge" - the joining or convergence of human consciousness with A. I. - I think this is a terrible, *misguided* idea - bad, post-Christian "theology" in matter-of-fact, [\[n.7\]](#) one that disparages physical bodies and physical sensations - the very things that God *chose* to make, and which reflect His glory.

And as such, they're not disposable *or* the problem.

And yet it is a (misplaced) hope which points us to something undeniable - the

universal sense that we all have that the world *as it is* is not as it should be.

A mystifying, perplexing riddle;

a messy, occasionally very disheartening, enigma.

That death, whilst largely inevitable and to be expected when one really understands the nature of the universe - dynamic, fluctuating, evolving, tending to chaos - shouldn't automatically apply to the peculiar thing, which is the human creature: both a 'worm', yes, as the Psalmist acknowledges, [22:6] but one also capable of symphonies and sonatas, sonnets, sudoku and salsa.

Which is why the author of *Psalms* - king David - doesn't stop there: '[W]hat are human beings that you are mindful of them...?'; he wanders aloud to God. 'Yet you have made them a little lower than [the Divine], and crowned them with glory and honor.'

- For such a being, mud, rot and decay - the grave, that is - seems incongruous; *unjust*. So, how to avoid it?

Well, it is simple really *for God, that is*; who, Jesus reminds us, "'all things are possible.'"

Now, I know it *seems* like He said lots of other things before this about selling *all* your possessions, camels and the eyes-of-needles and so on; which makes us stop short, and our eyes grow wide, and our palms grow sweaty, and our bank-managers twitchy.

And those remarks should.

The entrance ticket to Heaven is expensive - there's nothing more costly: "holiness."

The actual standard - as opposed to a rough approximation - is unachievable...*by us*.

This is why, in Romans chapter 7, Paul, reflecting on his time as a Pharisee - one who tried to live by the standard of Heaven - of The Law, the Torah - says 'the very commandment[s] that promised life proved to be death to me.' [v.10.]

Unworkable.

Beyond exhausting.

'But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' [1 Cor. 15:57]

Jesus has paid the price that that rich man - and you and I - could never afford. And that's the reality He wants us to acknowledge, and so by doing, fling ourselves on His mercy, and there, with him, will our feet find the 'level ground' of genuine salvation. [Ps. 26:12]

Footnotes:

1. See: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breeder\\_\(slang\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breeder_(slang))
2. Burns, Janet (13th of October, 2016), 'Elon Musk And Friends Are Spending Millions To Break Out Of The Matrix', *Forbes*, available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/janetwburns/2016/10/13/elon-musk-and-friends-are-spending-millions-to-break-out-of-the-matrix/#4cc891ae5ce1> (accessed October 6, 2018). (My emphasis.)
3. Friends, Tad (10th of October, 2016), 'Sam Altman's Manifest Destiny', *The New Yorker*, available at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/10/sam-altmans-manifest-destiny> (accessed October 6, 2018).
4. *Ibid.*
5. Smith-Spark, Laura (18th of November, 2016), 'UK Teenager Wins Battle to have Body Cryogenically Frozen', *C. N. N.*, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/18/health/uk-teenager-cryonics-body-preservation/index.html> (accessed October 6, 2018).
6. See: plastinated." - <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1195750/Michael-Jackson-set-plastinated-missing-deadline-cryogenic-freezing.html>
7. Morris, Michael (16th of May, 2017), 'Today's Futurists Resort to Ancient Paganism to Explain Away Christianity', *The Federalist*, available at <http://thefederalist.com/2017/05/16/todays-futurists-resort-comical-paganism-explain-away-christianity/> (accessed October 6, 2018).