



From Our Vicar

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The Dilemma of Innocent Suffering

Why do bad things happen to good people? It is especially distressing when we witness children suffering, their innocent lives cut short by war, tragedy or disease.

The question is further sharpened by claims of an all-powerful God who is also wholly good and loving. This is a complex and deeply personal and emotional question. We cannot expect a simple answer. The bible, while acknowledging the role of human freewill, sin, Satan and injustice, wrestles with this question and presents the paradox in its wisdom writings.

The Book of Job is the classic presentation of the matter. It challenges the rigid application of the teaching of God's promised blessing to those who obey God's law and warning of curses to those who do not. Its format is dialogue between Job and his friends. Job is presented as an impeccably upright man who has suffered the sudden and tragic loss of all that is dear to him, as well as being struck himself with an unendurable disease. He passionately vents his complaint to God at the injustice of his suffering. His friends strive to convince him that he must have done wrong, yet their attempts to do so become increasingly ridiculous as their frustration mounts at his refusal to accept their indictment.

Job never gets the answer he seeks. What he gets is an encounter with God in all his majestic wisdom. This ultimately satisfies Job and results in his restoration.

It is in the New Testament we see the question from another angle. Here is another innocent sufferer - Jesus - rejected by his own people, though faultless. The scriptures teach that in Jesus, God in his love entered the suffering of his people. His tortuous and unjust death plunged Jesus into solidarity with the worst suffering humans have ever endured. Through his resurrection he proclaims that death, injustice and suffering do not have the last say. There is a greater eternal reality that Jesus' resurrection heralds and opens to all who believe.

This does not magically remove the suffering of this world. It does, however, transform lives, and gives meaning and hope amid the struggles. It has also inspired and emboldened many to compassionately and sacrificially address the many causes of suffering, and so alleviate what people must currently endure - till Jesus returns and all is made new. This is solid grounds for hope in the most stressful of times.

The Lord be with you,

Wayne