

**Everything in us is accountable to God but Jesus, our great high priest, has lived in our world and meets us as One who understands**

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

*"The word of God penetrates" – a warning to those living a sham that faithless disobedience will be exposed by the living power of the word of God which acts like an all-seeing eye.*

*"Soul and spirit" – the human spirit together with the thinking, feeling, wilful soul. Taken together to mean the whole inner person.*

13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

*"Everything... laid bare" – The word of God (v.12) is speaking and acting as the judgment of God Himself. All our thoughts and intentions are*

**IN PRACTICE** The 'quiet time' of starting the day with God and the Bible, letting Him speak through His word, has deep roots in Christian tradition. Fashions change in discipleship, as everything else, but in a busy and confusing world, the need for this discipline seems to gain renewed emphasis. The 'down side', if there can be a disadvantage to learning to hear God speak to us, is that His word is truth. It is that sharp penetrating sword that exposes our heart. It is, very helpfully, a lamp to our feet and our path but also a bright light over the mirror that shows all our blemishes – the part we don't much like. However, God, in His love, is not so much about showing up what is in our heart, as revealing to us what in our heart we still need to let Him purify. He is in the business of redeeming and recreating and regenerating, and in Jesus a 'new heart for old' is His ongoing promise.

**QUESTION** *The devil will always find ways to try to prevent you having a quiet time in the word. How resolved are you not to be put off meeting with God in this way?*

**PRAYER** Lord, grow in me a greater love for Your word and for hearing Your voice of encouragement in the word. And show me, like the young man before Jesus, where I should conquer my self-sufficient pride to trust You for the greater things of seeing more of Your kingdom in my world. Amen.

*exposed, and accountable to the living, written Word, John 6:63, 68, Acts 7:38 as if to the author.*

14-15 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.

*"Great high priest" – for Jewish Christians, coming out of the Old Covenant priest and sacrifice tradition, knowing Jesus as the Great High Priest of the complete, final sacrifice was an important faith connection.*

16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

*"Confident... that we... receive mercy and grace" – because this high priest has the unique qualification of having been tested through suffering and death for us, Hebrews 2:9-10.*

# The Living Word

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The Bible readings for Sunday, October 14, 2018, with commentary

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **Sunday, October 14** in Bible order

*Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching*

Theme: **Heaven's fairness confronts man's pride and control**

Job 23:1-9, 16-17 – Job's heart is tested under Satan's oppression

Alternative OT reading (C of E option) Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Mark 10:17-31 – Jesus tests the heart of a wealthy follower

Hebrews 4:12-16 – The word of God judges our heart's attitudes

Also in this Sunday's readings: Psalm 22:1-15

**Job 23:1-9, 16-17** – Job's heart is tested under Satan's oppression

**A righteous man is blamed by his counsellors, but holds out for God's justice**

*Eliphaz, in the previous speech, has treated Job as a sinner, in the darkness of sin and for whom he has a remedy. Zophar, the the speech before that, went further in aligning Job's grave difficulties with his rebellion before God. There could be some truth in both positions, but Job does not accept either of them: he humbly asserts that they do not apply.*

1-3 Then Job replied: "Even today my complaint is bitter; His hand is heavy in spite of my groaning. If only I knew where to find Him; if only I could go to His dwelling!

*"If only I knew where..." – Job, true to his name ('iyyob, Where is the heavenly Father?), is trying to find God from his sense of abandonment. Eliphaz had instructed Job "Return to the Almighty" but Job (vv. 8-9 below) cannot find God to encounter Him.*

4-5 I would state my case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what He would answer me, and consider what He would say to me.

6 Would He vigorously oppose me? No, He would not press charges against me.

*"Would He... oppose Me?" – Job's change of heart, expecting to find justice, Ps. 97:2, having worked through his earlier fear that God would be too*

*powerful for him to be heard, Job 9:14-20, 33-34.*

7 There the upright can establish their innocence before Him, and there I would be delivered forever from my judge.

*"I would be delivered" – Job is confident, as a God-fearing worshipper, of a fair hearing, leading to acquittal. The gospel is here in this passage, which looks forward to the justification to be found, not in the tally of our good deeds, but through the relationship we have with Jesus Christ alone, Romans 4:25-5:1; 8:1.*

8 "But if I go to the east, He is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find Him.

9 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.

16-17 God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me. Yet I am not silenced by the darkness, by the thick darkness that covers my face.

*"My heart faint" – Job's affliction was physical (sores and wasting) but also what we categorise as mental illness. The devil's oppression is a combined attack on (human) spirit, (thinking, feeling) soul – and (physical) body. "Thick darkness" – Job felt he was groping in darkness, familiar to anyone battling depression.*

**IN PRACTICE** Despite physical illness and mental torture, Job's heart is proving to be true. Far from blaming God for his misfortune, the devil's scheme, He is trusting God for his deliverance. He feels sure that if he could have that conversation, that hearing, that He would find that God was for him. God is for us. It will always be the devil's strategy to sow thoughts in our minds that God is for others, but not us; that we have done (or not done) something that exposes us to judgment and keeps us out of favour. This is the folly of the religious mind. The spiritual person, who knows God personally through Jesus, will know that it is our heart, and the relationship with God that guards our heart, that gives us assurance - and ultimately deliverance.

**QUESTION** *Why would God allow such a good person as Job to go through this trial of sickness and a feeling of "thick darkness"? How does Job's faith, even while questioning, help us?*

### Mark 10:17-31 – Jesus tests the heart of a wealthy follower

**Mark's version of the story of the rich young man who had ticked the boxes for observance, but overlooked the priority of love**

17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to Him and fell on his knees before Him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

*"A man ran up" – previously in Mark's story Jesus encountered small children who had no standing and were completely dependent. By contrast this was a young man, probably a member of a council or court, Luke 18:18, Matt. 19:20, commandment-keeping and rich. Jews of that time would consider him (wrongly!) to have a great standing with God and therefore claim to salvation.*

*"What must I do" – the question of a religious, but not spiritual, person. He showed respect to Jesus ("fell on his knees") but simply didn't understand Jesus' teaching of how the kingdom of God is entered, Mark 10:13-16.*

18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good - except God alone.

19 You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall

not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honour your father and mother.'"

*"Why do you call Me good" – Jesus is not denying His goodness, but making the man think about his question and focus on God. Will he recognise the goodness of God incarnated in Jesus? Will he recognise that only God Himself is intrinsically good?*

*"You know the commandments" – Jesus mentions the six that address wrong actions and attitudes to others including "fraud" for covetousness.*

20 "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

*"All these I have kept" – this doesn't read well to us. But the man is sincere. For him, the law is about conforming to the doing, the externals (like the six commandments Jesus quoted). Jesus makes him think: what is missing? The requirement to have a good heart, to love God and, by extension, have God's love for others, Mark 12:29-30; Exodus 20:3; Deut. 6:5. Entering the kingdom of God is always a step of repentance, Mark 1:5; 6:12.*

21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in

heaven. Then come, follow Me."

*"Sell everything...give to the poor" – not a general command, but addressing the stronghold of self-sufficiency that was holding this man back from salvation.*

22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

23 Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

24-25 The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

*"Camel...through the eye of a needle" – the largest animal and the smallest opening. The idea of a laden pack animal shedding its baggage to be led through a narrow postern gate is a great illustration that may (or may not) have been in Jesus' mind.*

26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

*"Amazed...Who then can be..." – Jesus has overturned the generally accepted idea that riches are a sign of favour from God.*

27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not

with God; all things are possible with God."

*"Who then... with man this is impossible" -- this man, they would have thought, was an outstanding candidate. Jesus explains that there is nothing we can achieve of ourselves to gain salvation. It comes only by relationship with God and receiving His gift.*

28 Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"

29-30 "Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – along with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life.

31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

*"Left... for me... will receive..." -- followers of Jesus share a family generosity that transcends social and geographical borders. In this context, the hospitality of a hundred homes and families sharing the same values.*

*"First... last and... last first" -- the kingdom order upends the accepted order of wealth, privilege and the merit of having kept the externals. The kingdom is experienced by disciples with no other claim than looking to Jesus and accepting the challenges of His humble way.*

**IN PRACTICE** This favourite story, also told by Matthew and Luke, goes right to the heart of our walk with God. Here was a man who had done all the right things that the law said were to be done, but how he felt about God was still a bridge to be crossed. Throughout history, man has put the first commandment - to love God with all our heart - on a shelf while working at all the others. The intention was to be so captivated by God and broken by His love, that everything else follows as a consequence. The rich young man had a theology of 'doing' - we might call it religiosity - but who had his heart?

**QUESTION** *Jesus asks us the same question from time to time: where is our heart? Can we do no other but to follow Him wholeheartedly, or is our human desire for self-sufficiency holding us?*