

I vividly recall the morning. Sitting at my desk in the Parish of Alstonville. The phone rang. I could barely recognise my dad's voice. Crying profusely he told me that my young cousin Jason had been killed in a car accident on the way to work. An unexpected tragedy that changed forever the lives of his parents and twin sisters. Their only son, their big brother gone. The nature of tragedy. Coming out of nowhere, destructive, life changing. Thousands of years before this tragedy impacted my family. Thousands of years before the tragedies that touch your lives, Job experienced profound tragedy. The totality almost beyond our comprehension. Like Jason's death. Like the events of 9/11. Job's tragedy unfolded on a normal day. No one saw it coming. No warning for Job and his family. A poignant reminder that however we might try we cannot fireproof ourselves, or those we love, from the possibility of tragedy. We know Job's tragedy is coming because in last week's passage we are witnesses to the divine council at which the outcome is shaped. The horror of the tragedy sinks in as we hear it through the pages of Scripture. The description in **1:13-19** unable to truly convey the shocking tragedy. Suffering and loss resulting from evil human activity: acts of terrorism and premeditated, calculated aggression. Tragedy deepened by what the insurance industry calls acts of God: lightning strikes and a terrifying cyclone. Job's family and servants dead, material possessions destroyed. In **2:7-8** the tragedy continues as Job is inflicted with a painful skin disease covering all of his body. So painful he scrapes his skin with a broken piece of pottery trying to alleviate the pain. We are told *'he sat among the ashes'* the local garbage tip where rubbish is burnt. The picture Jesus uses to describe hell. Job is experiencing his own personal hell. Brothers and sisters, we must not gloss over and hurry by this scene of overwhelming tragedy and trauma. It is tempting to do so because the scale of suffering is almost too much to handle emotionally. Yet we are called as Christians to feel enough so we do not lose our capacity to genuinely love and walk alongside those who are suffering. Paul exhorts us to *'Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.'* **Romans 12:15** Unlike Job we know this destruction and suffering is the malicious, hostile work of Satan, the destroyer. In **2:3** the LORD speaks of Satan ruining Job without reason. Yet with the insight gained last week we know Satan can only act within the limits placed upon him by the LORD; doing no more or less than God instructs. God is in control; using Satan as a tool in his perfect purposes. *The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life."*

**2:6** By his very nature Satan would want to destroy Job completely. In God's purposes Satan is restrained from doing so. It is bruising to the soul to be exposed to the immensity of Job's loss and the depth of his suffering. It is uplifting to witness his response. A model for us. A reason to glorify God in praise. **First**, Job grieves deeply. Shattered, utterly desolate. His heart broken beyond words. *'At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head.'* **1:20a** Symbolic acts of mourning. Sisters and brothers, please put away any conviction that somehow displaying grief is a sign of lack of faith as a Christian. Nowhere does the Bible even hint that a stiff upper lip is a Christian virtue. People will express their grief in different ways, some more outwardly than others. That is OK but grieve we must. **Second**, Job worships and blesses the LORD as the God he truly is. The giver of everything with absolute right to give and take away as he chooses. The one we are completely dependent upon for everything we have from the beginning to the end of our lives. Job maintains the integrity of the true believer trusting God with the circumstances of his life. *Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.* **1:20b-22** A response shaped in the fiery furnace of severe testing. Brothers and sisters, the New Testament calls us to respond with the same faith and trust. *'Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.** Earlier this year, 16 year old Nathan Barry a committed Christian died of cancer. Tumours invading his heart and brain. From his hospital room he made a video for his school as a testimony of his trust in the goodness of the God who saved him for eternity. At his funeral his grandfather, an Anglican minister, said, *'God rules as the sovereign; as the king; the ruler over all things so that all things work together for God's good purpose in the lives of his children. There's nothing outside of his care or control. Nothing that happened to Nathan this last year was outside of God's control or God's concern. Neither Nathan nor God lost the battle against cancer. It was all part and parcel of God's good purpose for Nathan. At first this sounds extraordinary, but God is God; he is sovereign; he doesn't lose control.'* Those words are true of our lives too. **Third**, Job resists Satan's temptation to curse God. Satan's temptation comes through Job's wife whose motivation is unclear in the story. She believes death is the only means of

peace and release for Job. There is a hint she believes God deserves to be cursed for treating Job so badly. Job refuses to curse God. In faith he cooperates with the providence of God recognising whatever God brings he is good and in control. As Christians we read the Old Testament through the lens of God's progressive revelation of himself and his purposes throughout the period of history covered in the Bible story. Job's story points forward to another true story. The great man, Job, is a shadow of the greatest man in human history. A sinless man who emptied himself of all glory dying a shameful death. Job's story points to Jesus Christ, the completion of God's revelation. Job's story speaks to our story for we share a common humanity. Here the common link is the role of Satan in achieving God's purposes through us. In **Luke 22:31-32** Jesus says, "*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*" Satan sifted Job, Satan sifted Simon Peter and the other apostles. Satan sifts us, testing whether faith is genuine. Satan is still on the attack. God still gives Satan permission. But Jesus death on the Cross changes everything. Satan defeated, no longer permitted in the divine council, denied access to God to accuse believers before the LORD. **Colossians 2:15** sums it up, '*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*' Satan still accuses us but God is not listening. The accusation cancelled and covered by the finished work of the Cross. Christians are put right with God. No longer any condemnation, consciences cleansed by the blood of Christ. So like Job we trust God and worship our Creator because he is worthy of worship in the worst of times and in the best. We acknowledge with even greater clarity than Job is able that the glory of God, more important than our own comfort, is displayed in the face of Jesus Christ.