

LIVING WITH AMBIGUITY, PAIN AND HOPE.

(Job 16:1-7; 19:16-26)

The 6th June 1944 brought hope to my family in Holland in a time of deep darkness. The Allied forces had landed in Normandy and peace seemed to be very near. But then, during the Battle of Arnhem (shown in the film 'A Bridge too Far') things turned for the worse. Half of Holland had been liberated. The other half, where we lived, was still occupied by enemy troops for a further 8 months. The winter of 1944-1945 was one of the severest ever. There was no fuel, no freedom and no food. Thousands of people died of starvation; others were killed by enemy soldiers. Our family survived by eating sugar beets and cats.

But winters don't last for ever. As the slow witted gardener Chancy says in the film 'Being There': "After every winter there comes a spring."

Spring came in April 1945 – crocuses, tulips, lilacs, daffodils and wonder of wonder – allied aeroplanes dropping food parcels in 'Operation Manna'. Three weeks later, whilst daffodils were in full bloom, the war finished for those still living. A terrible winter was over. We were overjoyed and celebrated.

There have been other terrible winters in my life.

In 2000 our son was diagnosed with myeloid leukaemia and later underwent a bone marrow transplant. The following year my wife Bev discovered that she had an aggressive form of breast cancer and underwent surgery and chemo therapy. And last year our daughter gave birth to her first child, a beautiful daughter, who suddenly stopped breathing 24 hours later and suffered severe brain damage. She lived for only another day and died in her mother's arms. Each of these events made us confused, frustrated and angry and full of questions.

But Bev and I are not alone in this. Most of us gathered here today have experienced the winter of ambiguity, of uncertainty, of pain, anger and unanswered questions. You may have experienced moments of false hope. Some of you have lost dear friends or loved ones especially through cancer. Others are at this very moment going through times of darkness and fear and uncertainty.

Our earlier Bible reading tells a story about Job, a fine and sincere man for whom suddenly everything goes wrong. He loses property, friends, family and his health. Three friends hear of his misfortune. They visit Job and try to help. The first one says: "You must have done something wrong!"

The second friend tells him: "You must change the way you are living. You must repent."

And the third one says: "You have offended God and this is your punishment."

But Job rejects their advice and maintains that he has lived a good and upright life. His friends are of no help to him. They try to find explanations for the unexplainable question- 'Why do good people suffer?'

We live in a world of ambiguity and pain that cannot be explained with clichés and simplistic answers- not even religious ones. It is not helpful to say: "This is part of God's plan for you" or "It was meant to be".

Job finally gets fed up with his so called friends and says:

"How long will you torment me and break me in pieces with words?"

After expressing his rightful anger and frustration, there is for Job a wonderful ray of hope and a moment of insight – it is like a daffodil raising its head through the cold ground in spring and suddenly we hear these amazing words from him:

"O that my words were written down!

O that they were inscribed in a book!

O that with an iron pen and with lead
they were engraved on rock forever!

For I know that my redeemer lives,

and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.....

then in my flesh I will see God whom I shall see on my side..." (Job 19: 23-27)

Job was not into denial, he faced the terrible things that were happening to him with honesty and integrity. He was not a Pollyanna either. But he experienced what happens to so many of us, when we least expect it. Often in quiet moments, in times of reflection or meditation or listening to music, there comes a moment of insight, of joy and hope. A friend of mine said years ago: "You can rarely see God's grace in advance, but you can often see it in retrospect."

Today we give thanks for the daffodil, the symbol of hope and friendship in our lives. We give thanks for **true** friends, for new discoveries in medicine and treatment, for the certainty that after each winter in our lives there comes a spring!

Rev Tom Plaizier
Daffodil Day Service
August 28 2009