Trust that we can live our mortal life free from the fear of change

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Pentecost + 21 B – Job 23 1-9, 16-17, Psalm 22 1-15, Hebrews 4 12-16, Mark 10 17-31

Yabbies are delightful creatures. You can trick them into hanging on the end of a baited string and slowly pull them in until they’re really close. But if you want to catch them, you have to be really quick and deft, or their pincers can really hurt.

Today’s Bible passages are a bit like that. From a comfortable distance, they’re pretty interesting. But to get the most out of them, we have to know pain. The pain that they describe has to meet whatever pain there is in our lives. And then the pincers close. As long as we keep the story and our reality at a distance from each other, they’re pretty benign. But risk letting them come together and the pincer-effect can make things very real. And it seems that’s what we’re meant to do.

Job and the Psalmist both speak from the perspective of feeling trapped in the pincers of pain, powerlessness to change things. Job and the Psalmist cry out that they are trapped in the pincers of mortal existence: the pain of undeserved suffering on the one side, and the pain of God’s absence on the other. Job longs for it to end – *17 If only I could vanish in darkness, and thick darkness would cover my face!*

The pincers of mortal existence can trap us through no fault of our own – like it seemed to do with Job and the Psalmist. We’re just mortal, and pain is part of the deal. But those

pincers can also sneak up on us because of choices we make. There might be an ambiguous looking situation like that good-living, rich man we saw come to Jesus today nervous about his prospects for eternal life. Unlike Job and the psalmist who were trapped the pincers of deprivation and suffering, the rich man's trap turns out to be his comfort and prosperity. Jesus saw that he was caught in the jaws of his parents and society's expectations on one side, and his unwillingness to leave on the other. To *inherit* eternal life, he needed to free himself from his expectation that he inherit and perpetuate his social standing. He needed to free himself from that, otherwise he'd perpetuate the trap.

How can anyone become so trapped that they can't respond to the love and the call of Jesus? He knew what Jesus was; he knew what Jesus was doing. He saw others around Jesus who'd left everything to follow him. And yet something drew him back to the comfort of what he knew, as sad as it made him.

Humankind is still doing that. We're *not* changing our comfortable lives as we should for the sake of the planet – for the sake of our children and theirs. We're wilfully deaf to the voice of wisdom; of science; of compassion. We're somehow deaf even to the anguish of those suffering monstrous climate catastrophes.

We'll give to charities, of course. But we'll also go on voting for governments who promise us they'll preserve our 'standard of living'. We are behaving like frogs in water being slowly brought to the boil; we're staying put. It's warm and comfortable there; apparently.

So what must *we* do to inherit eternal life? One side of the pincer is in place for all of us – it's whatever danger we ignore. If we play the right mind games, we can flex ourselves just shy of this pincer's point; we can close our minds to warnings of the consequences of selfish choices we make. We can choose, for example, to ignore the cries for help from

around the globe and pretend they're far away. It won't happen to *us*, surely.

But what does Jesus say about that? Jesus saw that the good-living rich man was in the pincers of the expectations of his parents and society on one side, and to his own expectations on the other. To *inherit eternal life*, he needed to free himself from the pincers of those expectations; the pincers of the comfortable life. He's trapped in the delusional pincers of business as usual, and he needs to be set free. So Jesus says, *Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor*.

Jesus called for compassion – for this good-living, rich man to ease the grinding poverty of all those people around him. But more, to risk genuinely feeling it with them. Can he choose another pincer and risk being committed to the one he's never known? Can he choose to be trapped in the reality of the life that Jesus chose; a life lived in solidarity with those in need. It's painful; compassion. But are we changed at all? What changes? Well everything actually. A change of perspective changes everything, and we might suddenly discover what we're here for.

The call to us, is to trust – trust that we can live our mortal life free from the fear of change. We are called to grow daily in our consciousness that we live in the presence of the God who loves us. We are here to learn that however trapped or uncertain we may feel, Jesus sees us for who we are, and still loves us.

We're not called to a life without pain – heaven knows Jesus wasn't spared. We're called to a life lived following, as best as we can, the one who took on human frailty and vulnerability to the end. He did it so no *matter* the pain of our life, we are sure that we're never alone in it. What are we really here for?

As we gather for our vestry meeting after this service, we are

to evaluate our mission action plan and see if it stacks up to this gospel mission call. Amen