

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

October 11, 2015

Proper 23B/Ordinary 28B/Pentecost 20

The readings this week:

- Job 23:1-9, 16-17 ◦ Psalm 22:1-15
- Hebrews 4:12-16 ◦ Mark 10:17-31

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Questions with No Answers

By the time we get to the twenty-third chapter of Job, a lot of water has gone under the bridge. The broken, but altogether devout, man we left in the early narrative section has met his prosperity-gospel friends.

They've tried to convince him that God is just, and therefore his own egregious sins are the cause of his calamitous misfortunes. There can be no other explanation: *God is a just God.*

But, the more they've pressed that point, the more Job comes to his own conclusion: Since he knows that he's innocent, it is clear that God has mistreated him. For Job, there can be no other explanation: *he has done nothing wrong.*

Job then wants to have a day in court. He wants an arbiter: a "redeemer," or "go'el" to intercede on his behalf. He's utterly convinced that if he can get someone to plead his case to God, and for God to hear him, that he will be vindicated.

And, honestly, it's really hard to not side with Job on this one. I'm mean if Job did get his day in court... what would God say? Job lost his family, fortune, and health ...on a bet? With the devil?

But that's where the storyline breaks under the point of the whole book. This whole thing really has nothing to do with the particulars of Job's story. The story of Job is the story of every righteous victim. It's the story of every good person to whom bad things have happened.

And, in that case it isn't that Job's friends are right, and that he's actually deserved his tragedy. They aren't right, and in the end of the book God Himself says so plainly.

Bad things don't happen to us because we've deserved them. As Jesus says, "the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike." (Matthew 5:45)

But, when horrific things happen to us, it *also* isn't the case that we've been wronged by God. Every time life collapses in front of us and we're left sitting in the dust, it isn't time to blame ourselves or blame God. Most of the time, there is no one to blame. No one is found at fault. That is, at its core, what The Book of Job is about.

But, when you come back to the storyline, The Book of Job is also about having the freedom to feel and utter such thoughts. Job is reeling from a horrific turn in life, and as a person in relationship with God he turns to God in the process of mourning. And, like all of us in Job's shoes, we want to know "why."

Sometimes we ask why like a shy little mouse, and other times we roar it into the night. The Book of Job tells us that it's OK to ask such questions of God. In fact, it is the faithful response.

And, Job, like us, learns that there are no easy answers to those "why's," if there are answers at all.

~ Rick Morley, [a garden path](#)



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Job 23:1-9, 16-17](#)

Recall a time when a friend or family member really listened to you. How did you feel? How did that person's listening help you? What does Job now want more than anything? Why do you think Job finds God so elusive? What appears to be Job's main remaining problem in establishing his righteousness with God? How does Job's experience show the difference between a God who comforts through silence and an absent god who is not really there at all? Why do you think people sometimes find God unresponsive when they say they are seeking him wholeheartedly? What does Job's case teach us about waiting? How does Job's attitude help you to wait for God? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 22:1-15](#)

We jokingly refer to places we despise, or would never want to go near or visit again, as "Godforsaken." But being forsaken or abandoned by others is no laughing matter. Do you have a "Godforsaken place" in your past experience? What was that like? David did not shrink back from asking tough "why" questions. Neither did Jesus in quoting verse 1 (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34). What were David and Jesus experiencing at the time they prayed this prayer? What kind of relationship have this psalmist and his people enjoyed with their God? This psalm conjures up images of sword fights, bull fights, dog fights and a lion's den. What scenes of violence contemporary to your experience does this psalm conjure up for you? At what points can you identify with the psalmist or with Jesus? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)



Praying Toward Sunday

God of infinite patience and wisdom, we come to you with so many things that claim our time, our energy, our resources, our very lives. We are easily drawn away from serving you by the enticements of the world for wealth, ease, and comfort. We are owned by our possessions, held captive by our treasures. You continue to offer to us healing and hope. You seek to transform our lives from captivity to freedom in witness and service. Help us to place our lives and our trust in you, knowing that with your help, many wonderful things can be accomplished which will provide hope and peace for others and ourselves. Give us courage and strength to truly be your disciples. For we ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

~ from the **Ministry Matters** website. <http://www.ministrymatters.com/>

...It would seem that we can have a type of boldness that brings us to the very throne of grace or we can have a type of boldness that leads us away from the Christ. And it seems that Jesus is saying neither of these paths will be very easy. As Peter boldly proclaims, "We have done it, Jesus! We have left everything and followed you. When will we see the benefits?," Jesus reminds him that receiving eternal life is absolutely and completely impossible - when we try to manage it on our own. However, if we will boldly approach God and allow God to manage things for us, Jesus says, "Nothing is impossible for God."

That is a pretty bold statement in and of itself. Thank God for a bold Jesus!

~ An excerpt from "Be Bold!" [Mariam's Tambourine](#)

3rd Reading: [Hebrews 4:12-16](#)

Describe the most secluded or isolated place you have ever been. How did you feel about being there? How can the Word of God show the condition of your heart? Hebrews 4:13 says that we must "give an account" to God. What would be the outcome if the account we give before God were based on our own actions? How do verses 14-16 emphasize both the deity and humanity of Jesus? What might keep you from approaching Jesus for the help you need? How does this passage encourage you to come to Jesus for that help? [Living Hope](#)

4th Reading: [Mark 10:17-31](#)

What was Jesus' first response to the young man's question of how he could have eternal life? Was Jesus advocating a works-based salvation? Why or why not? If the young man had truly kept all of the Jewish commandments in his life, he would have appeared to others as if he had undergone transformation. But, what did his response to Jesus' command to sell all of his possessions indicate about the reality of his internal transformation? Why did Jesus choose the area of possessions for this man to forsake? Can being obedient to the commands of Scripture indicate a changed life? What is the difference between simply following external rules and exhibiting evidence of a transformed life? What areas in our lives would Jesus point to as a lack of evidence for our transformed lives? Do we often treat Jesus as a therapist who makes recommendations or the Lord who makes demands on all of our decisions? How would our view of Him affect our obedience to His demands? [The Church at Brook Hills](#)