

# Stretching Toward Sunday

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

October 10, 2021  
Proper 23B/Ordinary 28B/Pentecost 21

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](#)



A home on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, post-Katrina. Photo by Rick Morley.

Stuff happens. Germs happen. Earthquakes happen. Evil happens. People who hurt do awful things. You know, don't you, God does do something about that. God has sent you to heal, to do justice.

~ An excerpt from [Angry at God](#), by Steve Garnaas-Holmes, *Unfolding Light*

# Reflecting on the Word



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

Job's friends insist he has done something sinful to deserve treatment like this from God. How common is this belief today? In the first portion of the chapter Job speaks as if he is in a courtroom before an accuser and judge. What is his "case?" What is Job complaining about? What kinds of images does Job use to voice his complaint? Why might Job's adversities seem more bearable if he could sense God's presence? What do you think Job means that once he has been tested, he will "come forth as gold?" What things has Job done that prove his innocence before God? Why does Job fear God? Why do you think he mentions this? How does it add to the distance he feels? The last verse is significant – even though Job feels alone, and even though he is afraid, still he does not keep silent. What does this say about Job's faith? What is required of us when we face difficult times like this? [Faith Element](#)

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

Have you ever asked God, "Where are you?" Have you ever felt like the world was against you and God was distant and silent? If so, what was it like for you to endure that particular storm in your life? Is there a disconnect between what you know to be true about God and how you feel? What do you do when you feel distant from God? When you read this psalm, what does David "feel" as he struggles through life? What other "feeling" does David describe in this Psalm? Have you ever been under attack? What does David do as a result of what he knows to be true of God? In what way is Jesus the perfect example of praising and honoring God in times of difficulty and trial? How can his example help you in your time of difficulty and trial? [Eagle Christian Church](#)

### Praying Toward Sunday

God, You heap your love upon us  
like a parent providing for a family's needs,  
embracing a child with tenderness.

Forgive us when, like spoiled children,  
we treat Your generosity as our right,  
or hug it possessively to ourselves.

Give us enough trust to live secure in Your love  
and to share it freely with others  
in open-handed confidence  
that Your grace will never run out. Amen.



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Without a name, the rich young man becomes everyone. You. Me.

The encounter with Jesus begins the story - being loved, being known, and then walking sadly away. Jesus lets him go. Perhaps Jesus loved and knew him well enough to know this man's journey would perfect itself in the absence of Jesus, ever trying to make up for his loss with a life of holiness. Sometimes a loss, a mistake, a bad decision, sometimes even tragedy, shatters you so much that grace can seep through the brokenness. Sometimes for you and for me, the brokenness becomes the holiness, perfected in the empty space between imperfection and desire.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

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

Hebrews 4:16 encourages us to "with confidence draw near to the throne of grace." What do you know about God and about yourself that would make you feel like "drawing back" instead of "drawing near" to God's presence? The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus can sympathize with us because he entered our sin-cursed world, and took upon himself real human body. What "weaknesses" do you experience that you are most thankful that Jesus also can identify with? Because Jesus is both sinless and sympathetic, we can approach him, and he can approach God on our behalf. How does this truth affect. . . the way we view our trials? . . . the way we view our sin? . . . the attitude in which we approach God in prayer? . In what "times of need" do we especially feel we need God's mercy and grace? [Life Group Study](#)

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

When we think about people who are wealthy, money or possessions usually comes to mind. What other forms of wealth do people have that can hinder them from entering the kingdom of God? When the rich young man addressed Jesus as "Good teacher," why did Jesus say, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone"? After Jesus clarifies that God alone is good, He perceives that the rich young man knows God's law and says, "You know the commandments . . ." and then waited for the young man's response. Why do you think Jesus did not answer the question directly the first time? What is the significance of Jesus not pointing out this man's idolatry right away? What is God calling you to sell in order to follow Him? This question is not limited to material possessions. In other words, what worldly treasures or pleasures or dreams (or even comforts and securities) is God calling you to lose for His sake? Or, what things have you surrendered in the past? [Trinity Evangelical Free Church](#)