



Ordinary

by Lori Broschat

October 11

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

Job's words echo throughout the history of humankind. They are taken up by the spiritually and emotionally destitute. They resonate with the suddenly unemployed and the terminally ill. They are the despondent cry of the chronically depressed and anxious. To be honest, there is not one of us who has not at some point looked out at our unsatisfactory surroundings and wondered just where God has gone.

Not even Jesus. As he hung on the cross in our place and accepted death for our sake, he cried out in the words of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Many a commentary writer has argued the motivation behind Christ's cry, so I will not do that here. I believe the ache of humanity desperate for a word from God speaks for itself. So how do we accept these raw emotional outbursts in the face of a faith we claim as comforting and peaceful?

If we listen to Job's petition for God's attention, we find a common desire. "Would he contend with me in his great power? No! But he would take note of me." Oh, to know that God would give us a moment of his time, just to listen to what we have to say! We imagine God is so distant, so ignorant of our needs. Job concluded that God was doing a disappearing act wherever he went, eluding him for whatever reason.

Perhaps Job lacked the confidence found by the author of Hebrews, who took a sense of certainty from God's word. The word of God is what dissects our very soul, discerns our thoughts and our emotions. It illuminates us in

God's eyes so that no one is hidden, no one is unseen. So then, if our despair blinds us to God, the way to correct our vision is to search out God in his unmovable presence, in the pages of his eternal wisdom.

October 18

Job 38:1-7; Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35;
Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45

There is nothing like a great rebuttal, especially when it comes out of a whirlwind. When we, like Job, demand attention and answers from God, we had better be prepared for whatever comes. God declares that fair is fair—if we question him, he will also question us, and we will answer him. Fair is fair. If we seek out an audience with God it should be with the understanding that God deserves to be heard, as well.

God speaks to us through so many sources; through creation, through prayer, through Scripture, through other people we encounter. Disregarding these divine vocalizations can only lead us into that place of despair and solitude again. We must open ourselves up to the experience of God in every aspect of our lives. Why should God be limited to those opportunities where we look for a chance to dialogue?

James and John, those sons of thunder, thought they would communicate better with God if they were seated next to him. Such a destination requires much of us and cannot be requested irreverently. Sure, we dream of snuggling right up to a God of comfort and grace, but will we not be taken aback by the power to which we will be exposed? To be in proximity to God

means we will have to be ready to see and be seen, to hear and be heard.

The privilege of inheritance as children of the kingdom comes with a duty to respect the head of our family. Our fond desire to be known by God should be matched by our hope of being found worthy of his time. Oh, his ear is ours, but what words can we say to the God who redeems us from all our unrighteousness and shame?

 October 25

Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Psalm 34:1-8;
Mark 10:46-52; Hebrews 7:23-28

You have heard it said that seeing is believing. In our Lectionary readings for today that would seem to be the case. Three individuals had their eyes opened—one through the process of being humbled; one through the sense of taste, and one literally through the healing of physical blindness! These individuals all were privileged to view the same thing—the goodness of the Lord. Interestingly, it was God’s sense of hearing that led to these experiences of renewed sight.

After listening to Job’s plaintive pleas for answers, God gave him more information than Job required. Job had to throw up his hands in surrender because he realized he had spoken of things too wonderful for him. Job was humbled, yet pleased, for the result of his ordeal was to be restored to his previous state of blessedness. It was like the playing of a country western song in reverse: you get your job back, your dog comes home, and your sweetheart returns to you!

On the other hand, David—who certainly had a life filled with misery to rival that of Job—could well celebrate when he was in God’s graces. He pledged to praise God continually because when he looked for God, he was heard and delivered from trouble. Therefore he offered up a challenge to others to “taste and see” the goodness of the Lord. God hears, we see.

As for the one whose eyes were once literally closed, his bold cry to Jesus for help was

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prefaced with proper recognition. Jesus was moved to stop and give heed to Bartimaeus. In a curious statement, Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” How would you answer that question? This is not a genie popping out of a magic lamp. This is God asking.

Do not trifle with the affections of God. Do not call him out and then refuse to show your face. For if you can stand before him by faith, by faith you shall be blessed. Oh yes, you shall be blessed!

 November 1

Hebrews 9:11-14; Mark 12:28-34;
Ruth 1:1-18; Psalm 146

Questions and controversy. It seems that wherever Jesus went he was confronted by curious or offended religious leaders. Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes all sought him out to respond to his teachings. In today’s gospel reading it was a scribe who came to Jesus, impressed with his correct answers to the religious experts. The conversation that ensued seems to be a case of “who’s quizzing whom?”

The scribe may have been seeking to clarify the truth or to put Jesus to the test. His inquiry as to which commandment was the greatest is amusing. Surely this man whose profession required him to have extensive knowledge of the holy text must have known the answer to his own question. Jesus obliged him by reciting the ancient words of Deuteronomy, known to the Jew-

ish people as the Shema. This commandment was given to the people of Israel hundreds of years before and was still the hallmark of their faith.

Combined with the command to love one's neighbor as oneself, these two laws cover all the bases of the original Ten Commandments. Love for God, love for others. Satisfied with Jesus' answer, this scribe boldly told the Son of God that he had answered correctly. It reminds me of the scene in "Fiddler on the Roof" when Tevye says to God, "Why should I tell you what the good book says?"

The scribe added rightly that obedience to God was worth more than blood sacrifices. This truth is echoed in Hebrews 9. Christ's sacrifice was worth more than all the blood of all the animals ever shed. Animal sacrifice was sufficient to purify the flesh, but Christ's sacrifice allows our consciences to be purified, which enables us to worship the living God.

The Greatest Commandment speaks to this enabling. We need a pure mind and heart in order to be obedient to the God who made the ultimate sacrifice for us.

November 8

Hebrews 9:24-38; Mark 12:38-44;
Ruth 3:1-4; Psalm 127

There's an old joke about a lunchroom in a Catholic school. At the head of the line was a large pile of apples with a note that read: "Take only one. God is watching." Farther down the cafeteria line was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. One of the children had written a note of his own. The note he placed in front of the cookies read: "Take all you want. God is watching the apples." Today's gospel reading is like that, only without the humor.

Imagine the contrast in the scene from Mark's gospel. Jesus had just finished warning his disciples against being like the pompous scribes. Then he sat down to watch the collection plate in the temple. He used the opportunity as a teaching

tool. The widow unknowingly became an object lesson. How could she know when she went to the temple that day that her precious and heartfelt gift would be the best? The very nature of giving out of one's poverty speaks of a sense of humility.

Which, of course, is the point Jesus was making. When we come to give our gifts we need to come in a spirit of placing ourselves in the altar. Would we withhold a part of ourselves in worship? In service? In prayer? Why then would we not bring our gifts in wholeness? When Christ came to give his offering, it was once for all. His sacrifice was perfect. He gave out of his self-imposed poverty.

Would we give differently if Jesus was watching our collection plate? We know that he is, unseen. So for us who are still imperfect, our goal is to give from that place of wanting to give our best to God. Not that we have to give up all that we have to live on, but with the desire to match the effort and the willingness of Christ. What we need is to practice the humility capable of making us love God more than we love the things we consider life-giving.

November 15

Psalm 16; Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25;
1 Samuel 1:4-20; Mark 13:1-8

What did the writers of Psalm 16 and Hebrews have in common? They both knew that the right hand is the preferred hand. The right hand is symbolic of all that is good and pure and, well, right! The left hand was considered suspicious and evil. In fact, the word sinister is Latin for left. (Note that this should not be taken to have any implication on "left" and "right" metaphors in American politics!) To the original writers and readers of today's texts, to be at God's right hand or to have God at one's right hand is a very good thing.

If God is at your right hand you will not be moved. In God's right hand are everlasting plea-

tures. When Christ had completed his mission, he took his place at God's right hand. Everything seems to be exceptional in life if we stay to the right. Unfortunately, some of us have lingered too long on the left. Some of our congregants or those we serve only know how to live on the left.

They've never seen their goodly heritage or experienced the fullness of joy that comes from being in the presence of God. We have the duty to direct those people to the right. We need to make them understand how to seek the counsel of the Lord, how to feel his instruction as they lie in their beds at night. They are longing to experience a heart that is glad, a soul that rejoices, and a body that rests secure. What we take for granted as we prattle on from the pulpit is what some have never known. How will they know unless we can point them in the right direction?

Talk about how the blood of Christ has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. Talk about the confidence we have to enter God's sanctuary. Talk about approaching in the full assurance of faith with clean hearts and pure bodies. But don't for one minute assume that the words you speak are falling on enlightened ears or that you are preaching to the choir. You are also preaching to those who are stuck in the left lane desperate to turn right.

November 22

Psalm 132:1-12; Revelation 1:4-8;
John 18:33-37; 2 Samuel 23:1-7

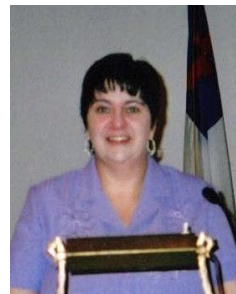
Last year on Christ the King Sunday during the children's sermon I tried to explain that my daughter lives in a country with a queen rather than a president. Unfortunately, the concept of a monarchy (outside of fairy tales, at least) was lost on the children. Admittedly, the concept of Christ as a King is somewhat lost on the average Christian.

We would be in favor of a constitutional monarchy where we get a say in Christ's kingship

of our lives, but what we fail to realize is that it was God's intent to reign over us from the beginning. He did not need our consent. He did not ask us to weigh in. God established his son on the throne of his kingdom at the time he called David to go from shepherd to sovereign. God swore an oath to David that if his offspring were obedient and faithful to the covenant there would never be a time when David's line would be off the throne.

Of course, the ability to keep God's covenant was not the strongest trait among the sons of David or anyone else's sons, for that matter. Therefore, God sent his own son to establish a new covenant with God's people. Christ was king before he came down to earth and remained king even after his death. When questioned by Pilate, he affirmed that he was a king, but there would be no throne for him on earth.

Now think on this. Jesus is the beginning and the end, the one who is and was and is to come. He loves us. He has freed us from sin. He has made us to be a kingdom. We are probably okay with the fact that he loves us and frees us, but how comfortable are we with being a part of a kingdom? The idea of being held to a higher standard is difficult for us to accept. So where do we begin to welcome the coming of a king who will call us to join him in eternity? What changes in our thinking need to take place as we approach the Advent season, the time of anticipation of the coming of Christ the King?



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