

Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary
Readings, Commentary, and Discussion Questions for October 14, 2018
Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 23

THE READINGS

First Reading: Job 23:1-9, 16-17 *Amos 5:6-7, 10-15*



- ¹ Then Job answered:
² “Today also my complaint is bitter;
his hand is heavy despite my groaning.
³ Oh, that I knew where I might find him,
that I might come even to his dwelling!
⁴ I would lay my case before him,
and fill my mouth with arguments.
⁵ I would learn what he would answer me,
and understand what he would say to me.
⁶ Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?
No; but he would give heed to me.
⁷ There an upright person could reason with him,
and I should be acquitted forever by my judge.

⁸ “If I go forward, he is not there;
or backward, I cannot perceive him;
⁹ on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him;
I turn to the right, but I cannot see him. . .

¹⁶ “God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me;
¹⁷ If only I could vanish in darkness,
and thick darkness would cover my face!”

Worth Noting: Job desperately wants to bring a law suit against God, but God avoids him. At the end, Job wishes to be out of the sight of God – ending Job’s existence – so great is his suffering. Have you ever known anyone so depressed? How do you come out of it?

Psalm 22:1-15 *Alternate: Psalm 90:12-17*

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
⁴ In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
⁵ To you they cried, and were saved;

in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

⁶ But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.

⁷ All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

⁸ “Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver –
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”

⁹ Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.

¹⁰ On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

¹¹ Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

¹² Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

¹³ they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;

it is melted within my breast;
¹⁵ my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

Worth Noting: Psalm 22 is best known in Christian circles as Christ's prayer on the Cross. Today, the psalm gives words to one in deep despair, depression for "I am a worm" and, with Job, to stand before a God strangely silent. Have you ever had cause to pray this psalm or another prayer like it? What response did you receive?

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:12-16

¹² Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

¹⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

convincing evidence of such a portal. Indeed, rather than following that route, one fifth century scribe, probably seeking to make better sense of the metaphor, switched from a camel (*kamēlos* in Greek) to a “rope or ship’s cable” (*kamilos*) passing through the eye of the needle. While still extravagant, the metaphor makes more sense, simply exaggerating one of the elements in the usual image (rope for a thread) rather than substituting an entirely different class of object.

Focusing on the metaphor in the passage deflects attention from the radical import of Jesus’ teaching on wealth: Get rid of it. This message was not unique in Mark’s world. Philosophers, those who taught the “art of living well,” similarly condemned the pursuit and maintenance of wealth as distractions from seeking higher, immaterial values. About four centuries before Jesus, the Greek Crates (c. 365-c.285 B.C.E.), for instance, followed Jesus’ prescription exactly, liquidating his fortune, distributing the proceeds to his fellow citizens, and living thereafter a life of poverty. Epictetus, about a generation younger than Mark, preached and lived a similar life. Crates, Epictetus, and Mark emphasized not helping the poor by redistributing wealth but freeing oneself for nobler pursuits.

The analogies with popular philosophers of his day raises the probability that Jesus’ remarks in Mark about wealth were meant to be taken very seriously. Wealth, they taught, tied one to illusions of security, wisdom, and immortality, goods attainable only through embracing a radically different lifestyle.

“Who’s in Charge Here?”

Or: “But What About My Retirement?”

The lengths to which some have gone to temper Jesus’ teaching on wealth are striking. When Jesus used other equally hyperbolic metaphors – as in take the log out of your own eye before trying to take the speck out of your neighbor’s (Matthew 7:2-5; Luke 6:41-42) – we easily recognize that (a) this is hyperbole and (b) it teaches an important lesson. While the hyperbole is obvious and teaching important, readers resist the radical implications of Mark’s teaching on wealth, as they may reject his teaching about becoming like a child (Mark 10:15) and the apostles’ example of leaving everything to follow Jesus (Mark 1:16-20). Perhaps like Job and his friends, we want fame, wealth, and power to receive divine sanction. We want God to bless the notion that the security and control of our lives rests in our own hands. We do not trust enough to be faithful to the message.

Questions for Discussion

Job (Job 23:17) prays to be extinguished and the psalmist calls himself a worm (Psalm 22:6). We grieve and worry and struggle to keep those so depressed safe. How does your community contribute to that work? Do you know the agencies in your community offering professional help?

From your experience, why would Jesus or philosophers/gurus advocate renouncing wealth? (Were the Beatles right and “All You Need is Love”?)

Some say that the rich young man’s life observing all the commandments expresses the life to which we are all called; renunciation of the world is for the super-saints.

Does this make sense to you? Will the after-life have gradations of happiness?

Jesus also says that those who renounce everything for his sake will receive a hundredfold in this age. Have you observed that to be the case, that those who, like the ancient desert mothers and fathers, give up material goods and family support, receive a hundredfold?



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