

Bible Study
Proper 23, Year B
October 11, 2015

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

Job 23:1-9, 16-17

There are two kinds of good love songs. The happy ones that make me spin around with the joy of new love and the sad ones that take me down to the pit of despair. There are very few in between. The song that Job sings in his despair to us takes our breath away. And this is how it must be for Job has experienced the death of his children.

Job's friends have pontificated to him their religious wisdom. His own beliefs about the universe and the God who made him have crumbled one by one. Who could do otherwise? Who are we to judge?

His poem of abandonment silences his well-meaning friends and all of us who seek to theologize over the graves of children. His words echo through time and space, reminding us that the tragedies of life do not make sense. Our losses call into question everything we believe about the goodness of God and the universe.

We have heard that God is love and that God loves us, but how does God love us when our children die and God is nowhere to be found? Job is crying for justice and he is weeping for his losses. Sometimes that is all we can do. The ancient people of God join him in this cry, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

God did not give a theological answer to Job's suffering, or all the suffering in the world since time immemorial. He gave his only son and this beloved son suffered on this planet. "Jesus is the answer to which every human life is the question," said John Paul II.

If we can sing this song with Job, here in the dust of death, perhaps we are able to enter more fully into the mysteries and joys of the incarnation and resurrection.

- What have you said when someone you know loses a child? What can you say?
- Why is there evil in the world?
- Where is God when I'm hurting?

Psalm 22:1-15 Page 610, BCP

"Eli, Eli," Jesus cried from the cross. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" We do not know why these final words from the cross were recorded in Aramaic. Why would the evangelists record the words of Jesus in his mother tongue? He was clearly quoting this Psalm, using the Psalm as countless humans have used it over the centuries, to put into words that experience which has no words.

To be forsaken by God is to be ultimately forsaken. Even the word, "forsaken" has a haunting quality about it that makes us shudder. In his anguish, in his suffering, he gasps these words as

he hangs between earth and sky. Our own words are too feeble, so we turn to Psalms like this and mumble them into the sink or shout them to the silent heavens.

These words are powerful, for they go deeper into the depths of despair than any other words we find in all the poetry of the world. They go deep into the heart of darkness, the abyss, that yawns before us and beckons us to abandon all hope therein.

No one can say these words out-loud without feeling their intensity. If you heard them on that first Good Friday you would never forget them. Not ever, no matter how many years separated you from the first Good Friday.

And that is why they are preserved in the original Aramaic.

- Have you ever found a poem that expressed your thoughts better than you could?
- What do you feel when you read that first line?
- Was there a time in your life when you thought God had forsaken you? What did you do about it?

Hebrews 4:12-16

I have only used a sword once in my life. I was a young Marine Corporal, the lowest Non-commissioned officer rank in the USMC. Being a corporal authorized me to wear the “Blood stripe” on my pants and carry a sword. The only day I carried a sword was one of my fellow Marine’s wedding day. I was part of the “Sword arch.”

On that day we stood at the back of the church, three on each side of the aisle. I stood facing another Marine from my Combat Engineer Company. We tried not to laugh as we stared into each other’s eyes for a very long time. When the bride and groom came down the aisle, we unsheathed our swords and pointed them straight ahead, forming an arch. The happy couple walked underneath the crossed swords.

A sword is a mark of rank in the military and no matter how ceremonial it is, it’s still a weapon. It’s blade is meant to cut into the flesh of the enemy and kill him. Swords are dangerous things. And so is the word of God.

The author of Hebrews says it will cut us to the bone. The word of God can determine what is happening in our hearts. It is little wonder that the Service of the Word in our Prayer Book opens with the Collect for Purity, a prayer that comes from this text of Scripture.

The word pierces and cuts us, reminding us of how far we have to go to be perfect, to be righteous. Thankfully, this text also tells us that we have a high priest who understands this about us. Reconciliation happens for us in two acts. First, when the God’s word pierces us and we stand honestly before God. Second, when our great high priest brings us right up to the throne of Grace.

- Have you ever felt that God was speaking to you?
- Was it a good feeling?
- What do you think about during the collect for purity?

Mark 10:17-31

My wife and I recently took our boys to a small art gallery in Austin. My pre-teen boys were intrigued by the simplicity of the paintings on the wall. Since they were in jocular moods, they started to quote lines from the Bob's Burgers episode, "Art Crawl." It's easy to make fun of contemporary art, especially if you are eleven or you don't look at it closely.

Then one of them said it. "I could have done that." "I could be an artist." My classic response, of course, was "But you didn't" and "Sure thing, have at it!"

As we were leaving, I showed the boys the Catalog. When they saw that one of the paintings was selling for \$45,000 their eyes grew wide with wonder. They looked at me. "Could this be?" They said.

Why does our understanding of something change when we know something was bought for \$45,000? For most things in life the retail cost is about the only way we know something is valuable.

Money isn't going away anytime soon. However, Jesus offers us the possibility to see past it, especially when it comes to the things that matter most in life. He tells this young man there is freedom in leaving things behind. Being with Jesus and his disciples is how we ought to judge value in this cash-rich and love-poor world.

- If you could put a price tag on every person and thing in your life, what would that look like?
- Do you love anything that isn't worth money?
- What is the largest amount of money you have ever given away to a poor stranger that you'll never see again?

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