

Proper 23
Cycle B RCL
Revised

Job 23:1-9, 16-17

This passage comes from the third cycle of arguments between Job and each of his friends. The third cycle is incomplete, ending with friend Bildad's short speech in Job 25:1-6. Job bases his argument on the belief that God could forget one or forget an entire nation. In the Psalms we find many calls to God to remember and not to forget either an individual or the nation. See, for instance, Psalm 10:11-12; 13:1; 44:24, etc. In 19:22-29 Job has explored the notion that a "redeemer" might read the record of Job's suffering before God. But he rejects this idea because by the time a redeemer reads the message and confronts God, Job will be on his deathbed, too far gone to recover. In our lesson Job imagines going after God directly and not waiting for a redeemer. If Job could find God, then God surely would not turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of a righteous man. Job, then, might well expect to be "saved forever by my judge (23:7b)." There is a fly in this ointment though. Job has no idea of where to look for God. Justice delayed continues to be justice denied.

Psalm 22:1-15

The first verses of this long *lament* are very familiar to Christian readers as Jesus's cry of dereliction from the cross (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34). In this lesson, the psalmist begins with the argument that God has saved the psalmist's forebears when they trusted in God, so why has God refused to save the psalmist in the present time? Further, the psalmist's troubles have so excited his enemies that they even make fun of the idea that one might trust God and be saved (22:8). This threatens God's *name*, God's public reputation, disinclining others to call upon the Lord for help. God kept the psalmist safe during childhood and so the psalmist knows that God *can* save him if God wills. Vivid descriptions of the psalmist's suffering complete the lesson (22:12-15).

OR

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Amos was a southern prophet who migrated to the northern Hebrew state of Israel and prophesied there during the reign of Jeroboam II (782-753 BCE). His message was an unremitting message of punishment for Israel because its leading citizens had grown rich by exploiting the poor. As a result of this sin, God had rejected the worship of Israel in its sanctuary at Bethel and had threatened to destroy it (5:6). The "house of Joseph" (5:6, 15) refers to the two largest tribes of the Northern Kingdom, Ephraim and Manasseh, whose forebears were the two sons of Joseph (Genesis 50:23); but in this context the expression, "house of Joseph," refers to the entire nation. Since legal proceedings were normally held in the gates of cities because of the shade they afforded, the reference to proceedings "in the gate" (5:10, 12, 15) refers to the law courts of Israel. Although Amos believed Israel's punishment was inevitable, he held out some hope that repentance might save a remnant of the nation (5:15).

Psalm 90:12-17

This *community lament* inaugurates the fourth of the five books in the Psalter. We are reminded

of the poetry of Job in the psalmist's complaint that God's righteous anger at Israel's sin is incommensurate with the seriousness of that sin because of the disparity of power and life span between Creator and creature.

Hebrews 4:12-16

Hebrews alternately holds the reader over the fires of perdition and within the highest courts of heaven. Those who lose heart, who are faithless in their Christian commitment, cannot hide from the awful judgment of the divine word (verses 12-13); but those who persevere in their Christian lives despite all of the temptations to fall away know that their own "great high priest" experienced every temptation they have experienced and yet managed to avoid unfaithfulness (14-16).

Mark 10:17-31

In the time of Jesus, Jewish sects, such as the community responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls, often referred to themselves as "the poor" as a way of claiming for themselves the special relationship between God and the poor spoken of in scripture. Christians continued this practice, and one Jewish-Christian sect even called itself "the Ebionites" from the Hebrew word for "poor" (*evyon*). Mark used this convention to underscore the radical break from the world required to follow Jesus. The rich young man went away disappointed because he could not bear to give up his wealth (10:22), and Jesus comments upon this by speaking about the impossibility of the wealthy entering the new kingdom he is bringing (10:25).

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