

## October 14, 2012

*What would life be like if we couldn't get through to God? This question becomes especially critical in those moments when we are enduring pain, suffering or doubt. For people in every generation the challenge has been getting access to God so that we can get our problems fixed.*

### **Job 23: 1-9, 16-17**

*This is Job's conversation with himself. His life is a mess and God is nowhere to be found and this makes Job angry. How do we feel when it seems like God is hiding?*

<sup>1</sup>Job replied:

<sup>2</sup>I'm not letting up—I'm standing my ground.

My complaint is legitimate.

God has no right to treat me like this—  
it isn't fair!

<sup>3</sup>If I knew where on earth to find him,  
I'd go straight to him.

<sup>4</sup>I'd lay my case before him face-to-face,  
give him all my arguments firsthand.

<sup>5</sup>I'd find out exactly what he's thinking,  
discover what's going on in his head.

<sup>6</sup>Do you think he'd dismiss me or bully me?  
No, he'd take me seriously.

<sup>7</sup>He'd see a straight-living man standing before him;  
my Judge would acquit me for good of all charges.

<sup>8</sup>I travel East looking for him—I find no one;  
then West, but not a trace;

<sup>9</sup>I go North, but he's hidden his tracks;  
then South, but not even a glimpse.

<sup>16</sup>God makes my heart sink!

God Almighty gives me the shudders!

<sup>17</sup>I'm completely in the dark,  
I can't see my hand in front of my face.

### **Hebrews 4: 14-16**

*The author of Hebrews makes a case for the value of prayer, but no neat, eloquent prayer. No, he insists that prayer that will actually reach God has got to be bold and daring and completely honest. If we trust that our prayers through Jesus really get through, then we are freed to move forward with ours lives.*

<sup>14</sup>Now that we know what we have—Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God—let's not let it slip through our fingers. <sup>15</sup>We don't have a priest who is out of

touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. <sup>16</sup>So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**THANKS BE TO GOD!**

### **Sermon – “I want to talk to your boss!”**

(phone dialogue)

**ME:** “Hello, I’m \*\*\*\*, how can I help you?”

**CALLER:** *\*angry\** “Are you in charge there?”

**ME:** “Yes, ma’am. I am the most senior person here. What can I do for you?”

**CALLER:** *\*yelling\** “So you have a boss?”

**ME:** “Yes, ma’am.”

**CALLER:** “I’M NOT TALKING TO YOU! I WANT TO TALK TO YOUR SUPERVISOR!”

**ME:** “My supervisor isn’t here right now. I have the authority to help you, ma’am, if you’ll just let me know what it is you need-”

**CALLER:** “I REFUSE TO SPEAK TO ANYONE BUT YOUR SUPERVISOR! YOU ARE ALL USELESS!”

**ME:** “I’m sorry, ma’am, my supervisor isn’t here right now. I am in charge.”

**CALLER:** “YOU ARE USELESS!” *\*HANGS UP\**

Can you hear Job in this conversation?

It is so frustrating to feel so desperately in need of a solution to lives trials and tribulations and NOT be able to reach someone who can actually help.

Afshan Jafer, who teaches sociology at Connecticut College wrote an article: “I want to speak to your supervisor” in Inside Higher Ed.

She addresses the issue of the growing incidence and intensity of calls from parents to universities and colleges demanding action re: their children.

Behind this is the conviction that if you just go high enough in the bureaucracy, you will find the person who can/will give you what you want.

Job’s life was in shambles and he had done nothing to deserve his suffering => bad stuff happens to good people -> that statement has been true throughout human history – even, perhaps, within our own experience.

The passage today draws us to that dark moment when, in the midst of our pain, we entertain the notion that God has turned off his cell phone and our calls are not going through.

Karl Jacobson, professor at Augsburg College, points to this as the heart of the Job story:

The apparent absence of God

In the face of this, Job is propelled forward with argument and complaint.

One of the most basic characteristics of being human is the capacity to sense injustice and to fight against it. We experience something as unfair and are willing to stand up and say so; we put ourselves on the line rather than submit. Michael D. Guinan, O.F.M.

Like a caller to customer service who will not give up and continues to demand to speak to the person in charge... Job insists that God must hear his case.

Job is not about speaking "about" God, but speaking "to" God.

Kathryn Schifferdecker from Luther Seminary writes: (workingpreacher.org)

Job speaks to God directly, honestly. He holds on to God with a fierce faith. He calls on God to answer him, to help him. He laments, in other words, and through that lament, something like hope is born.

So before you start drifting anticipating another about praying and everything will get better... we need to shift our focus to the passage from Hebrews.

Have we progressed from the bleakness of Job's experience? is there any way for us to get through to God? is it possible to have hope in our suffering that isn't trite.

Tom Long, an eminent American preacher writes of the speaker in Hebrews: (Hebrews, Interpretation)

He does not want them to pray like bureaucrats seeking a permit but like children who cry out in the night with their fears, trusting that they will be heard and comforted.

Scott Shauf, a Religious Studies professor from North Carolina, encourages us to approach Jesus "boldly" in prayer – not timidly, not holding anything back – not hiding anything back.

This sounds like Job but with a significant evolution in belief.

Writer of Hebrews speaks of God through the filter of Jesus.

In Jesus, God knows human suffering and death – Jesus can identify with the whole spectrum of human weakness.

In Jesus "God gets us"

It's a 2-way conversation.

We get connected to the boss!

I gravitate to the God revealed in these passages.

- This is the God who knows what I look like in the morning and doesn't run.
- This is the God who sees me mean and angry and unreasonable and doesn't hide.
- This is the God who stands firm in the worst that happens => when the people around us have reached their limit of compassion or tolerance – God's well doesn't run dry.

Ann Jarvis teaches at Wycliffe College, an Anglican seminary at University of Toronto. She wrote: "Empathy and the New Testament" for a journal published by McMaster U. Divinity School.

She tells of how the ancient people, Greeks and Hebrews believed that gods could not understand human experience – this must have been incredibly isolating.

BUT

She reflects on the role of Jesus is how Jesus embodies God's empathy for humanity – God who doesn't just listen but who now participates in our humanity

She makes this fascinating observation:

What is remarkable about God's Son is that he empathizes not only with humanity but also with God in the world. That is, it is not simply that Jesus is Son of God who empathizes with human experience. He is that. But he is also Son of God who empathizes with God's experience of seeking to be heard by human beings.

So what do we take from all of this:

- Pray – even when you're angry, frustrated, self-righteous.
- Pray because even if God can't make sense of us, Jesus will help get the message through.
- In other words – we always get through to the boss.  
And that is reason for hope.

God's empathy for us – made possible in Jesus – sets up a new frame of reference – sets our lives in a different context – places us in a larger story – suffering but also resurrection.