



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 20
Proper 23 (B)
October 10, 2021

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

In this reading, we find the ever-faithful Job trusting in his God but nonetheless turning bitter and confused as the realities of life begin to torment him. As his pitiful situation drags on with his friends and family adding to his problems instead of encouraging him, he wakes up heavily burdened with a new set of complaints for his God. He seems to say, “Where is this mighty God in whom I trust? Show yourself so that I may present my case of injustice that has been handed to me.” Is this situation familiar to us? Do our friends and family watch and ridicule the suffering of the faithful in their midst and even encourage us to give up? “What kind of God would allow you to suffer that way? Why even bother believing?” they may say. But in the end, we know that Job’s heart remains faithful, his life eventually becomes even better than before, and those who tried to discourage him are humiliated. Let us, therefore, learn the lesson of Job and remain steadfast in our faith, trusting that the worst will soon be over and that our lives may even be better once the storm has passed.

- Have you experienced this kind of situation before? How did you feel about God?
- What were the effects on your life after weathering the storm?
- How would you encourage others who are suffering in this kind of situation?

Psalm 22:1-15

In this psalm, we find the distressing scene of somebody who feels abandoned by God in his time of great need while being surrounded by his enemies. Even his own people have deserted him; it is a cry of defeat. He is conflicted by thoughts of his lifelong faithfulness to God and even the faithfulness of his ancestors. While he continues to pray in earnest, calling out to God to rescue him, there is no answer. Often this psalm is associated with the last moments of Jesus on the cross with, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. This should allow us to reflect on the character of Jesus and our understanding of him. His emotion shows that while Jesus is truly divine, he was also truly human. He understands our pain and suffering, and perhaps even a feeling of abandonment by God. Jesus also clearly knew well the Hebrew Scriptures—our Old Testament—valued the writings, and could relate them to his own life and ministry.

- Why do think the feeling of abandonment by God is a regular theme throughout the Old Testament? Have you also experienced these feelings?

- How do you feel knowing that Jesus understands our pain, suffering, and even doubt through his own human experiences?
- How do you feel about the Old Testament, knowing that Jesus himself studied and applied it to his own life?

Hebrews 4:12-16

In this section of a letter written to those in danger of abandoning their Christian faith because of outside pressures, the writer tells us of the power of the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God, in awakening our consciousness to our true faithfulness to Jesus. The writer encourages us to be courageous in remaining faithful to him. As Episcopalians, it seems that sometimes we try to avoid engaging meaningfully with Scripture. It can intimidate us, and we are sometimes afraid to be challenged by it, preferring to be ignorant of its messages. It can be painful to imagine how far we really are from being true followers of Jesus. If we want to grow in faith and find a new confidence in being his followers in these days of merciless attacks against the Church from both inside and out, let us learn to enjoy actively engaging with the Word of God, and as the catechism of this church tells us, allow him to speak to us through it, so that we may be more faithful in knowing his will for us both as a Christian community and in our own daily lives.

- Do you feel or know others who feel pressure to abandon their Christian faith?
- Reflecting on the “Holy Scriptures” section of the catechism found in the Book of Common Prayer, how is your own understanding of the Bible confirmed or challenged?
- What can we do to encourage more Episcopalians to engage with the Holy Scriptures?

Mark 10:17-31

In this story, we are confronted by the reality of our dependence on the mercy of God for our salvation. It is not intended to tell us that the rich cannot be saved. The story tells us of a good and faithful man who is loved by Jesus, but there is one problem: he is more attached to the cares of this world than he is to following Jesus. Instead of being willing to give up his possessions, the things that stood between him and the freedom to follow, it was easier to walk away. If we are honest, many of us are like the rich man, unwilling to pay the cost of truly following Jesus. If too much sacrifice is involved, we would often prefer to walk away. While we must always strive to be the most faithful followers of Jesus that we can, we are assured that we have a merciful God who does love us, just as Jesus still loved the rich man. This is also a humble reminder that even the richest of the rich cannot save themselves even with all the possessions in the world, but our faithful God through our faith in him has the power to save us.

- How would you feel if Jesus asked you to sell all your possessions and follow him?
- What have you sacrificed in your life to be a follower of Jesus?
- How has this story been presented to you in the past? How has your understanding of it been confirmed or changed after reading it for yourself?

*This Bible study, written by **Daniel Woods**, originally ran for Proper 23B in 2018.*