

**Devotion: August 11, 2020**

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

23 Then Job answered:

<sup>2</sup> *‘Today also my complaint is bitter;  
his hand is heavy despite my groaning.*

<sup>3</sup> *O that I knew where I might find him,  
that I might come even to his dwelling!*

<sup>4</sup> *I would lay my case before him,  
and fill my mouth with arguments.*

<sup>5</sup> *I would learn what he would answer me,  
and understand what he would say to me.*

<sup>6</sup> *Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?  
No; but he would give heed to me.*

<sup>7</sup> *There an upright person could reason with him,  
and I should be acquitted for ever by my judge.*

<sup>8</sup> *‘If I go forward, he is not there;  
or backward, I cannot perceive him;*

<sup>9</sup> *on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him;  
I turn to the right, but I cannot see him.*

<sup>16</sup> *God has made my heart faint;  
the Almighty has terrified me;*

<sup>17</sup> *If only I could vanish in darkness,  
and thick darkness would cover my face*

-----  
*“It gets darker and darker, and then Jesus is born.”*

I don’t know where I heard that, probably a Christmas play, but it stuck with me this past week.

2020 has felt like the year of Job, for me, for my family, probably for a lot of you.

This past week, due to circumstances way beyond my control, and not pleasant, I have a lot of questions for God. A lot of complaints about how things are going in my life right now. A lot of anxiety about the future.

But, maybe God is on sabbatical, and he didn’t take his cell phone.

And, when I think that, I can sympathize with Job, when he makes it clear that there is no way he could get any kind of a hearing to complain about his situation : *“Oh, that I knew where I might find him ....”*

Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever felt that God was letting you down and that you had nowhere to complain?

The 20th-century poet W.H. Auden once said that “Our dominant experience of God today is of God’s absence, of his distance,” and that is true for many in the 21st century as well. So in that regard, Job is someone with whom, at this point in my life, I can identify.

But, then again, I know more about Job's situation than he does. All Job knows is that in spite of being upright and faithful to God, terrible troubles have come upon him. He has no idea why, and when he complains and hears nothing in response, he can only assume that God does not care to answer — or perhaps isn't even listening.

From the place Job was standing, he could not perceive any evidence for faith. He was going through a long, dark tunnel where his prayer-phone seemed to have no reception. Yet in the longer view of his life, in what he had seen and heard and felt before the troubles came upon him and what he would see and hear and feel later, he had found and would find again that faith is not forever unsupported — only that in some of the deepest valleys, faith is all we have to keep us going. At such times, said the writer of Hebrews, "*faith is ... the evidence of things not seen*" (Hebrews 11:1, KJV).

And that's when I realize that the answer to Job's question of why God permits suffering comes only in the New Testament: "*Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross*" (Philippians 2:5-8).

So the answer to Job's question is: "*It gets darker and darker, and then Jesus is born.*"

*Lord, show us the headlines and the fine print; make them clear to us. Our heads are filled with the worries of the day. Our lives are restless with the changing of the times. We are tempted to think that we are caught in the web of circumstance and that there is no hope — and we despair! Show us the news, the bold print, and make it clear. Help us to rise above the worries of the day and in the fine print to know you are with us and the world. Transcend war and violence and generation gaps. Make the stranger like a sister or a brother, the widow like a mother, the convict like a son, and the hero like a neighbor.*

*Take us into the world  
in the laws we pass,  
in the rumors we stop,  
in the risks we take,  
in the convictions we show,  
in the issues we face, the lives we save,  
the sins we confess, and  
in the creeds we act upon.*

*Lord, show us the headlines of our world, and lead us to Christ in all these places, that we may know his way and follow it and always help us to be filled with hospitality, compassion and peace; in our Master's holy name. Amen*