

Job 23:1-17

Psalm 22

Mark 15:25-39

Jesus: God's word to us as our word to God

'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?'

Early in our reflections on Job, we saw that Jesus' question from the cross is precisely Job's complaint: why have you abandoned *me*? And, like Job's question, the question from the cross longs, yearns, *cries* for resolution.

For neither Job nor Jesus is this a question about the *power* of God. It is instead a question about *justice*. We have heard from Job this morning,

- ² 'Today...my complaint is bitter;
 his hand is heavy despite my groaning.
³ O that I knew where I might find him,
 that I might come even to his dwelling!
⁴ I would lay my case before him,
 and fill my mouth with arguments.
⁵ I would learn what he would answer me,
 and understand what he would say to me. (Job 23.2-5)

Job is relentless: Let God justify himself. He allows no dualistic release from the tension in this, as if he must await the outcome of a struggle between a good god and an evil god. He models no punch-pulling pietism. Job is simply honest. Job believes that God has the *power* to overcome evil, and so the *justice* of God's actions must be questioned. Where are you, God? Why do you not come with power, to set right what is wrong?

What would the power to overcome evil look like?

The gospel holds that such power looks like *Jesus*. This is not because he is the heroic saviour who will spend himself as a saving currency in his death on the cross. Jesus is God's power simply because everything that Jesus says and does is intended to be *effective*. His confrontations with the powers active in the world are no mere prelude to the 'main event' of the cross. These confrontations are the *prophetic word*, uttered as a call to repentance – uttered in *expectation* of repentance. *Jesus' word* is God's power to overcome evil. The ministry of Jesus seeks to bring righteousness.

From this perspective, the cross is quite simply a disaster: the failure of God's righteousness to find a home in us. (This failure Job also knows.)

But now, a question towards deeper understanding: if Jesus has been the prophet of God's righteousness to this point, is what he utters on the cross *still a prophetic word*?

This is difficult, but – *for Christ's sake* – let us not be timid. The charge of the prophet against the world now becomes a charge against God. To this point, Jesus has asked *us*, Why have you abandoned God? Now the charge is, *God*, why have you abandoned me? This takes us by surprise in the Gospel itself, although it is not new in the Scriptures. Job's double defence of himself against the injustice of his friends and the injustice of

God is the same kind of thing, as is the psalmist's crying out against enemies and the delay of God.

The *surprise* of this charge against God ought to give us pause. It is not enough that we resonate with the sentiment, as we might with Job's version of the question. 'Where are you, God?' is something we ask, of course, but do we expect it of *Jesus*? The messianic secret is now open: Jesus is 'the Son'. He has just acknowledged the coming 'cup' of suffering, and committed to it (14.36). We don't resolve the question by recognising that there's a difference between knowing that this is going to hurt – that the cup is *there* – and it actually hurting – *tasting* the cup. The cry from the cross is on the lips of *the Christ*. What we see here, then, is not merely that physical pain shapes theology. Pain does inform theology, which is why we have Job and the Psalms in the Scriptures.

But, as it tells what Jesus does and what happens to him, the gospel is always concerned with *who he is*. It is not merely *that* he cries out which matters here; it is as the *Son*, as God's *prophet*, that Jesus cries out.

Whom does God's prophetic word address from the cross? This word is directed *to God*. The prophet speaks to God a word *continuous* with that he has spoken to his disciples and to the religious authorities and to those in the streets and byways of Palestine.

How does the prophet prophesy *to God*?

Christian confession knows that to speak to Jesus is to speak to God, but we only *half* know this. We know it in the way that delivers Jesus as a 'human face' for God, that makes God more 'accessible' to us: Jesus is 'easier' than God. This is how the children's talk goes, and not a few sermons.

But this confession is much more profound. If our speaking to Jesus is our speaking to God, it is because for Jesus to speak to *us* is *also* for him to address God. When Jesus addresses *us*, he addresses *God*. This is not because we are divine but because *when the Son speaks, he always ultimately addresses the Father*. Only something like a trinitarian logic will make sense of Mark's portrayal of Jesus here. More precisely, only a trinitarian account of creation – of ourselves in relation to God – will make sense of Mark's Jesus, with his cry from the cross. What such an account would reveal is that there is no 'parents' retreat' to which the Father and the Son can withdraw to get us – the 'kids' – out of their hair for a few minutes (oh, for such a thing!). There is no direct Father-Son conversation across the dinner table without interruption and discord darting back and forth across the other way (oh, oh, oh, for such a thing!). We are *ever* in God's midst. God does nothing which does not involve us. There is no divine action in which we are not the cause or the means or the purpose of what God does. The prophetic word – at its harshest and at its most poignant – is directed both to us *and* to God, just as Job's harsh case against his friends is his poignant case against God.

God is the end – the *goal* – of all things, including God's own word. Jesus' cry from the cross, then, does not contradict who Jesus is and what he has done to this point. Rather, his cry *intensifies* his ministry. He addresses God now not 'through' us but *as us* – as one of us.

Jesus cries out as Job, who asks our suffering questions. And he cries out as Job's friends who, having mocked him at the foot of the cross, finally discover that they have misunderstood God, for they have been so caught up in their knowledge of righteousness and sinfulness that they had nothing more to hear from God.

Jesus – God's word to us – speaks our word to God. The sad song of God's searching after us one evening in the Garden – Adam, Eve, *where are you?* – finds its harmony in our responding word in Job and Jesus one afternoon outside Jerusalem: God, where are *you*?

The answer to *both* these questions is, *On the cross*: in Jesus-as-Job, in Jesus the Son.

In this double word – Jesus: God's word to us as our word to God – all things are reconciled in the only way they can be, in a world like ours, with a people like us, who reject the gift of God and ask for it again.

In this, the rule of God finally draws near: the reign of God among a people who would crucify God for God's sake, and their own.

There is no resolution such as Job's cry or the cry of Jesus on the cross would seem to seek, considered apart from who God is and who we are, *together* on the cross.

The cross is where it ends, but also where it begins again.

Repent, then, O Job – re-imagine yourselves and God – and believe the good news: the kingdom of the God we would crucify is come near, *in that crucifixion*.

In this way, God is finally ours, and we are God's.
