

Proper 24
Cycle B RCL
Revised

Job 38:1-7 (34-41)

The poetry of Job has been dealing with a question about the justice of God: Is God just, or is God just God? Job's three friends have weighed in to suggest that Job is suffering for his own wrongdoing, the classical answer to the justice question. The new friend, Elihu (32:6-37:24), is in agreement with them but adds the proviso that a sinner like Job on his way to the underworld would need an intercessor with God, an angel, a mediator to be saved from death (33:19-33). In today's lesson, we hear from the last counselor: Yahweh (the LORD). This is the first time God's name, Yahweh, has appeared in the poetry since Job 12:9 where it is part of a common idiom "hand of the LORD." This absence has led to speculation that there is yet another author at work in the Yahweh speech. Against this we observe that the last two verses of Elihu's discourse (37:23-24) anticipate the theme of the LORD's speech: The LORD is the mighty creator. Who is Job to question such a great God? However discouraging this answer, however, it is the answer to Job's repeated request in the poetry for God to give him a hearing. Now the LORD has done just that, but the LORD's decision was not what Job had anticipated. See 23:1-17.

Psalms 104: 1-9, 25, 37b

This is a *hymn* that particularly celebrates God's creative act. It was perhaps used as part of the New Year's celebration in the Temple of Jerusalem. The role of "wisdom" (*soxmah*) in creation (104:25) anticipates the role of Dame Wisdom in Proverbs 8, Job 28, and Sirach 24. The dreadful sea-monster Leviathan, whom some Hebrew myths had the Lord defeat at the beginning of creation (*cf.* Psalm 74:13-14, Job 3:8; 26:12-13; 41:1-34), is here just a figure of comic relief, and a creature like other creatures. (Readers may note that the *Book of Common Prayer* has renumbered the verses of this psalm by dividing verse 14 into two separate verses and by turning the last verse into two. The result is a psalm of 37 verses instead of the 35 verses in the Hebrew, Greek, and English Bibles.)

OR

Isaiah 53:4-12

The so-called "Second Isaiah" (Isaiah 40-66) was largely composed in Babylon during the captivity of the Jews in that city from 596 BCE (first deportation) and 586 BCE (second deportation) until 539 BCE when the Persian, Cyrus II, defeated the Babylonians and annexed Babylon to the Persian Empire. Within this corpus are four remarkable songs (42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12), called the Servant Songs that deal with a "servant" who will redeem Israel. Many believe these poems to have comprised a written source the Second Isaiah included in his composition. Most interpreters believe that the "servant" in all of these songs must be the exiled, suffering Israel itself.

Psalms 91:9-16

Wisdom psalms have no known function in the worship of the First Temple and may have become popular during the Babylonian Captivity when there was no temple. Scholars composed these psalms for the instruction of their students in the conduct of a successful life. During the Exile in Babylon wisdom instruction became increasingly religious, unlike the older, secular wisdom

represented in Proverbs 10-31. Remarkable in this psalm is the assertion that even the heavenly beings will protect the righteous wisdom student in the exercise of his piety (91:11-12).

Hebrews 5:1-10

This passage examines Christ's qualifications to be a high priest. Unlike other high priests in Israel's history who had bribed their way into the office or appointed themselves to it, Christ was appointed to the high priestly office by God in just the same way that God appointed the kings of Jerusalem. To support this claim, the author quotes the single verse from Jewish scripture that describes the messianic king as a priest: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4). So who is this Melchizedek? In addition to the other mention of Melchizedek in scripture (Genesis 14:18), we have a fragmentary text from the Dead Sea Scrolls that portrays Melchizedek not as an earthly king but as a heavenly redeemer. By the second century there were "Melchizedekians" in Rome who believed that Christ came to save humans and Melchizedek came to save the fallen angels.

As a final qualification for their priesthood, all human priests have to learn human suffering and sin through personal experience. Christ too learned the requisite sympathy through his own suffering and temptation. Christ is qualified in every respect to be the high priest.

Mark 10:35-45

If Jesus is, indeed, King Messiah, the Sons of Zebedee (Mark 1:19) reasoned that he would have to have a royal court with a vizier to sit on his right hand and a first minister to sit on his left; and they saw no reason why they should not be those officials (Mark 10:35-37). What they have not understood is that Jesus will realize his particular role as King Messiah through suffering and death, not through military victory or political process. Indeed, Jesus, who will be King Messiah in God's kingdom, could not grant them their request even if he wished to do so. He tells the would-be rulers that in God's new kingdom high office will reflect service, not privilege (10:39-44). Jesus' impending death will be the most important such service and will be a "ransom" (Greek: *lytron*, "purchase price," as for a slave) for *many*, a term that also occurs in the Dead Sea Scrolls to indicate the sectarian community. The servitude from which he will purchase the *many* is slavery to sin.

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