

Date: October 10, 2021 (Pentecost 20)

1. Texts: Job 23:1-9, 16-17; Ps. 22:1-15; Hebrews 4:12-16; Mark 10:17-31.
2. Subject: God.
3. Topic: Constancy of God.
4. Aim: encourage.
5. Proposition: "No matter what we perceive, God is always present. God is always God."

## GOD IS GOD ALL THE TIME

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"<sup>1</sup> Such was Jesus' plea from the cross of Calvary as he hung there, dying. At first glance this makes perfect sense. He had been tortured and crucified. His mother and best friends stood around, watching as his life leaked away. Anyone—everyone—would despair.

That despair doesn't give us much hope. Given all that surrounds us today, Jesus' despair might just push us into depression.

All this, however, is just on the surface. For centuries scholars have made it clear that, in quoting the first line of Psalm 22, Jesus was actually saying, "Please read the whole psalm." The whole psalm is as clear as the opening line, but the message is exactly the opposite.

The message of the entire psalm is this: although all looks dark around us and disasters threaten to overwhelm us, God is with us. God is God and he can be no other. His holiness, grace, power and love pierce the darkness and guard us against the terror. God cannot but be present to his people in their despair.

True: we cannot always perceive the nearer presence of God. But our perceptions do not form God's reality and truth. God is with us at all points, even at our worst ones, just as he has always been.

Yet it was you who took me from the womb;  
 you kept me safe on my mother's breast.  
 On you I was cast from my birth,  
 and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 22:1.

Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near  
and there is no one to help.<sup>2</sup>

But you, O Lord, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid!  
Deliver my soul from the sword,  
my life from the power of the dog!  
Save me from the mouth of the lion!

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.<sup>3</sup>

This was the reality that Jesus was claiming when he quoted Psalm 22. This was his truth from the cross.

In the midst of a pandemic and its economic impact, this is to be our reality and truth, even though we may not perceive God standing with us. This is where faith comes into play.

Faith is the choice to believe the best about your beloved, even when others say otherwise. Faith is the choice to trust your beloved, even when evidence seems to point in other directions. Faith is the decision to act according to the commitments of your beloved especially when the world around you is filled with darkness.

In the midst of a pandemic and the uncertainty it spawns, faith is the choice and decision of the Christian. We choose to trust God to be as he always has been.

But it is less clear what such trust will actually look like. I mean, trust doesn't stop fear. We feel what we feel. Trust doesn't change the circumstances that create our fear. The pandemic and the state of the economy will still be there. If you are afraid of catching Covid-19, you will still be afraid. If you don't know where your next job will be, you will still be anxious about the unknown future. So, what does trusting God to be God actually mean?

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<sup>2</sup> Ps. 22:9-11.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 22:20-21.

We'll have to start with the identity of God. After all, if we are choosing to trust God to be God, then we have to know who God is.

Of course, the best self-definition of God is Jesus Christ. In him we see all that God is but inside time, space and human experience. The eternal and saving love of God is poured into our experience in and through Jesus. The justice and righteousness of God is given human form in Jesus. The will of God is given its most divine expression in Jesus. We know who God is because we know who Jesus was.

As God inside time, space and human experience, Jesus trusted in God. Despite the fear of crucifixion and death, Jesus acted in love, justice and righteousness. Torture and death did not rob him of his commitment to the will and life of the Father. As Jesus is the embodiment of the love of God, so he proved that he is the embodiment of trust in God. Under extreme stress Jesus still lived in righteousness, justice and love.

For us, faith means to do and be as Jesus even as the pressures mount. To trust God and to have faith in God is to embody the righteousness, justice and love of God despite the fear and anxiety. We can act, despite our fears and anxieties, because we are trusting God to share the journey with us. We have faith that God will be who he has always been. God will not miraculously alter our circumstances, just as he did not change those of Jesus, Paul or Stephen. But just as they acted despite the threats, so we can act. We can be the signs of God's righteousness, justice and love despite our fear.

This is the message of the whole of Psalm 22. This is the message of the lives of Jesus, Paul and Stephen. This is our gospel of hope—Emmanuel, God with us even in the midst of our dark times. God is with us and for us. This is the gospel of trust and hope for our world in the midst of any crisis.

AMEN.