Reflections 13 – 19 October 2024

[Where are you, God?](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2024/133-september-october-2024-b/proper-23)

**Bible study on Job 23:1-9,16-17**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Our ever-present God,  
we pray that as we worship  
you will reveal yourself to us.  
By your grace forgive us  
and call us back to you when we are lost.  
In the fire of your Holy Spirit, warm us,  
by the wind of your Spirit, move us,  
with the love of Jesus, fill us.  
Amen.

**Read the passage**

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

**23**Then Job replied:

**2**“Even today my complaint is bitter;  
    his hand[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=job%2023&version=NIV#fen-NIV-13422a)] is heavy in spite of[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=job%2023&version=NIV#fen-NIV-13422b)] my groaning.  
**3**If only I knew where to find him;  
    if only I could go to his dwelling!  
**4**I would state my case before him  
    and fill my mouth with arguments.  
**5**I would find out what he would answer me,  
    and consider what he would say to me.  
**6**Would he vigorously oppose me?  
    No, he would not press charges against me.  
**7**There the upright can establish their innocence before him,  
    and there I would be delivered forever from my judge.

**8**“But if I go to the east, he is not there;  
    if I go to the west, I do not find him.  
**9**When he is at work in the north, I do not see him;  
    when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him.

**16**God has made my heart faint;  
    the Almighty has terrified me.  
**17**Yet I am not silenced by the darkness,  
    by the thick darkness that covers my face.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

This is a bleak passage with little obvious hope. In preaching, this would need to be acknowledged. There may well be some hearing the text who are in a similarly bleak place. The text needs to be handled with particular care, with hope offered from other sources. The Hebrews text could be helpful here (Hebrews 4:15 especially), as could the Gospel. The verses from Job come after the third round of speeches from Job’s ‘friends’ and immediately after Eliphaz’s indictment of Job (one commentator describes Eliphaz as the ‘kindliest of the three friends’). But even for Eliphaz, Job is plainly marked out as a sinner. So, he concludes that Job should turn back to God (i.e. repent) and accept God’s instruction. If he does, Eliphaz believes God will restore Job’s prosperity. For Eliphaz, piety and prosperity are inextricably linked. He cannot comprehend Job’s greater piety, which holds on to both his innocence and to the God whose actions are incomprehensible. Convinced that he has done nothing wrong, Job longs for the opportunity to present his case directly before God. Alongside this we have Job’s sense of despair as God proves to be elusive. Alongside Job’s physical suffering there is now clear evidence of mental anguish too in the form of fear (v.16) and severe depression (v.17).

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

‘Where are you, God?’ is the universal cry of the dispossessed, the frightened, the ill, the dying, the victim of violence. In the BBC drama Ashes to Ashes the detective Gene Hunt is investigating the murder of a child whose parents were faithful worshippers at a local church. Hunt visits the church as part of his investigations and walks past a crucifix. Looking at the figure of Jesus he asks, ‘Where were you when that lad needed you?’ Job experienced every form of pain imaginable but his deepest anguish seems to be the thought that God may have abandoned him. Jesus knew that anguish on the cross (Psalm 22.1). Hebrews reminds us that Jesus suffers with us. To answer Hunt, Jesus was suffering with the boy, as he also suffers with creation, and works to bring relief, healing and a heaven of justice and peace.

A person sitting in a dark tunnel

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**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

Where can I find someone to help?

Providing practical information

* Job reckons that if he could only find God and have a face-to face, ‘I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me.’
* But do we listen, to God, or to others? And if we need help with a problem, where do we turn? There are multiple charities and organisations that offer help and advice – it can be difficult to know where to start.
* Use local knowledge and search engines to identify those that might be of particular help in your context. Gather information to be displayed on the premises to help anyone who might need it. Include ministry offered by your own church staff, and invitations to worship or other events for those seeking God.

**A prayer to end the Bible study**

Holy God, we thank you for your living Word,  
which discerns the intentions of our hearts.  
We thank you for your Word incarnate, Jesus,  
who has suffered and been tested as we are.  
Give us the humility to ask for the grace and mercy we need in difficult times.  
**Amen.**