

## Divergence on the Lectionary - Proper 22, Year B (track one)

### First Reading

Job 1:1, 2:1-10

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

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Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.  
(ESV)

### Second Reading

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

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For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,  
or the son of man, that you care for him?  
You made him for a little while lower than the angels;  
you have crowned him with glory and honor,  
putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers;  
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” (ESV)

Gospel Text

Mark 10:2–16

And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. (ESV)

## Comments and Questions for Discussion

### First Reading

Most of us who've read Job know that the opening two chapters and the last part of the last chapter are in prose, while everything else is in verse. What I didn't realize until I studied it this week (How did I not guess this?) is that the prose part of Job constitutes a fairly simple story, and that the poetry in the middle was added. Not all of the prose, though. Basically, chapter one and vv. 10-17 of chapter 42. So, if we read the original story of Job, it goes like this:

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, “It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” Thus Job did continually.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand.

Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and there came a messenger to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.” While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.” While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.” While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

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And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job’s daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. And

after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

That reads really well, doesn't it? So, someone along the way inserted the poem about Job's conversations with his three "friends." What's more, most scholars seem to think that this was translated from some language other than Hebrew, though I haven't found anyone who can identify this other source. But the Hebrew is so awkward that it's unlikely it was written that way originally.

This helps me make sense of the two different images of Job that I find in the book. In the prose section, Job is patient and faithful. In the poetic portion Job is impatient and cries out at the injustice that he's suffering. Both have something to teach me, but they just don't fit very well together.

This week, though, we skip over most of chapter one to a part of chapter two that appears to have been written by the editor who put the prose and verse sections together. The prose of chapter two serves as a transition from the original story to the poetic section. (As does the phrase about Job praying for his friends at the end.) While we don't have those verses, chapter two also introduces us to the friends who will argue with Job for most of the book. In our reading today, Job's wife steps into the role of adversary in anticipation of the harangues that he will suffer at the hands of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

Scholarly opinion on the dating of the book of Job varies, from the time of the patriarchs to the time of the Persians. Because of the clear redactional evidence within the whole of the book and the themes of loss and promise alongside that of the question of "cursing God" or "insisting on one's righteousness," it seems to me that dating this during or right after the exile to Babylon makes the greatest sense. As we read more of Job in the weeks to come, that setting for the book may be useful in understanding some of the "why" for its composition.

## Second Reading

When we read texts excerpted from the letters of Paul, I try my best to keep in mind the situation that occasioned the letter. To read them for what they are, not as independent theological treatises. This, unfortunately, is nearly impossible to do with the letter to the Hebrews. First, it is almost certainly not from the hand of Paul. While this letter was collected early on among Paul's letters, even early commentators on it expressed doubt that he'd written it. Then, it is difficult to determine the intended audience. While a majority of scholars would place the letter some time in the early years of the Jewish War (late 60's), there are enough who would date it later to make it hard to be certain.

What seems to me to be clear is that the “letter,” thought by some to be a sermon later edited to serve as an epistle, was written to help sustain Jewish believers in a time of persecution and crisis of faith. Some students of the letter see in its exaltation of Jesus the beginnings of a discontinuity of Christian thought with its ancestral Judaism, but I find myself agreeing with those who see quite the opposite.

There have been a number of commentators on Hebrews who perceived in it an underlying theme of journeying, of sojourn. Being faithful through this period of sojourn seems to be an image that binds the letter together. Some have suggested that we should read that sojourn as a continuation of the Babylonian exile. That while many of the captives of the exile may have returned, the current state of things (read conflict with Rome) is just an extension of the exile that was never truly concluded. The letter holds out the promise that in Jesus, this exile will be finally ended with the inauguration of the “heavenly Jerusalem.” (12:22)

As appealing as this way of reading Hebrews is, I found an article this week that has a different take on the sojourn of Hebrews and makes better sense to me. Matthew Theissen has written that he thinks the ongoing journey that lies behind Hebrews is actually considered by the author to be a continuation of the Exodus, in which, according to the author, Israel had never really “entered into God’s rest,” the promised rest. According to Theissen, though the people had entered into and taken possession of the *land*, they had never enjoyed the promised *peace*. I won’t try to condense his entire argument here, but it makes sense, and [HERE’S A LINK](#) to the article itself so that you can read it.

So as we read from Hebrews for the next few weeks, this will be the background against which I’ll try to comment on the individual texts.

If you’re reading from the NRSV in church this week, you’ll see a lot of plural nouns. “Human beings” for “man” and “mortals” for “son of man.” While I get the value of being inclusive, this choice masks some valuable bits when studying the text. Obviously, “son of man” has certain overtones that are worth noting. Here, the author of Hebrews clearly uses the phrase as a general term for humankind, not Jesus, because he contrasts this “son of man” for whom everything is *not yet* subjected with Jesus who *has* been crowned with glory and honor. But then the NRSV actually makes things a bit clearer by using “them” where the Greek has “him” because the “him” is still a collective reference to “man” or “son of man” meaning all humankind. So the shift from “him” to “Jesus” is much clearer having used the plural. It is strange to me that the translators who tried to take masculine imagery from “man” and “son of man” then turn around in verse 11 to

insert the word “Father.” It’s not there. It literally just says that the one who sanctifies and the ones sanctified are “from one.” ESV adds “source,” NRSV adds “Father.”

Sorry for all that, but I thought you might get confused by the differences in the NRSV and the ESV.

The major point for me, though, is that while God has subjected all things to humankind (a la Genesis) we do not yet see all things “under our feet.” This harkens back to the overarching theme of unfulfilled promise that ties much of the letter together. This will come to be more important as we get farther into the letter and the place of “faith” in Christian life, but for the moment we have promise and reality contrasted to one another. And it “is fitting” that the founder/author of our faith should be perfected through suffering because the letter’s readers are themselves suffering still. The promise of the Exodus has not yet been fulfilled.

### Gospel Text

I’ll get to the teaching on marriage in a moment, but I’d like to draw your attention to something that pops up right at the beginning of our reading from Mark for this week. The Pharisees come up to “test” Jesus. This isn’t an insignificant choice of verb for Mark. Now that we’re in the second half of the Gospel everything shifts. Most of the “grasping” that Jesus did in the first half in order to heal people or raise them up is done by Jesus’ opponents, who seek to “grasp” Him (usually translated as “lay hands on Him”) in order to kill Him. And Jesus’ opposition has changed, too. In the beginning it was Satan who “tested” Jesus. Now that role has been given over to the scribes and the Pharisees.

Then they ask Jesus a trick question about divorce. They know the law that Moses gave concerning divorce, but they also know Jesus reputation for compassion. They know too that divorce placed a terrible weight on the divorced wife. She would be unable to support herself. She’d be unlikely to be able to find another husband. Many would descend into begging or prostitution. So they have Jesus in a bind, does He contravene the Law of Moses for the sake of women, or does He go with Moses and leave women to fend for themselves.

Jesus does neither. This is not a teaching about divorce, meant to stand for all time in place of Moses’ law. Jesus’ response is a typical rabbinic response that sets one set of Scriptures against another. He doesn’t “outlaw” divorce, He uses Genesis to protect women from the abuses to which men in Jesus’ day put divorce. For centuries this text and the one in Matthew have been used to do exactly the opposite of what Jesus intended, they’ve been quoted to oppress women. It has kept women in abusive

relationships, sometimes at the cost of their lives. But if this text is read as Jesus intended it, it is a saying in support of women. Context, my friends, is everything.