

Worship Service

BY DAVID M. BRIDGES

In this service, based on the book of Job, the congregation inhabits Job's position. A narrator describes his condition and three readers recount the speeches of his "friends," Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. These readers may dress in appropriate costume to deliver their speeches. The songs and hymns, which respond to these speeches and address the universal phenomenon of human suffering, may be performed by the congregation, choir, or soloists.

Prelude

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 9:11-16

Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all. For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.

I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with few people in it. A great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. So I said, "Wisdom is better than might; yet the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded."

Call to Worship:

"Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen"

*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen,
nobody knows but Jesus.*

*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen,
Glory Hallelujah!*

Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down (Oh, yes, Lord),
sometimes I'm almost to the ground (Oh, yes, Lord). *Refrain*

Although you see me going along so (Oh, yes, Lord).
I have my trials here below (Oh, yes, Lord). *Refrain*

African-American spiritual

Hymn:

"God Has Spoken by the Prophets"

God has spoken by the prophets,
spoken the unchanging Word,
each from age to age proclaiming
God, the one, the righteous Lord!
'Mid the world's despair and turmoil
one firm anchor holding fast:
God eternal reigns forever,
God the first and God the last.

God has spoken by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son,
brightness of the Father's glory,
with the Father ever one;
spoken by the Word incarnate,
God of God, ere time was born;
Light of light, to earth descending,
Christ, as God in human form.

God is speaking by the Spirit,
speaking to our hearts again;
in the age-long Word declaring
God's own message, now as then.
Through the rise and fall of nations
one sure faith yet standing fast:
God abides, the Word unchanging,
God the first and God the last.

George W. Briggs (1875-1959)

Tune: HYMN TO JOY

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Narrator (Job 1:1-5, 13-21; 2:7-8):

There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. 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 had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred 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 feasts in one another's houses in turn; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the feast days had run their course, Job would send and sanctify 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." This is what Job always did.

One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you."

Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

Song:

"Goodness Is Stronger Than Evil"¹

Goodness is stronger than evil,
love is stronger than hate,
light is stronger than darkness,
truth is stronger than lies.
Victory is ours through Him who loves us.

Desmond Tutu

The Speech of Eliphaz (Job 4:2, 7, 12, 17-21; 5:1):

“If one ventures a word with you, will you be offended?
But who can keep from speaking?

“Think now, who that was innocent ever perished?
Or where were the upright cut off?

“Now a word came stealing to me,
my ear received the whisper of it.
‘Can mortals be righteous before God?
Can human beings be pure before their Maker?
Even in his servants he puts no trust,
and his angels he charges with error;
how much more those who live in houses of clay,
whose foundation is in the dust,
who are crushed like a moth.
Between morning and evening they are destroyed;
they perish forever without any regarding it.
Their tent-cord is plucked up within them,
and they die devoid of wisdom.’

“Call now; is there anyone who will answer you?
To which of the holy ones will you turn?”

Hymn:

“Why Have You Forsaken Me?”

Terry W. York

Tune: PSALM OF FAITH (pp. 42-43 of this volume)

The Speech of Bildad (Job 8:3-10):

“Does God pervert justice?
Or does the Almighty pervert the right?
If your children sinned against him,
he delivered them into the power of their transgression.
If you will seek God
and make supplication to the Almighty,
if you are pure and upright,
surely then he will rouse himself for you
and restore to you your rightful place.
Though your beginning was small,
your latter days will be very great.

“For inquire now of bygone generations,
and consider what their ancestors have found;

for we are but of yesterday, and we know nothing,
for our days on earth are but a shadow.
Will they not teach you and tell you
and utter words out of their understanding?"

Prayer (based on Lamentations 5):

Leader: Remember, Great God, what has happened to us.

People: See our disgrace.

Our inheritance is given to strangers,

Our homes are given to aliens.

We have become orphans with no father,

Our mothers are like widows.

We must pay for water to drink,

We must buy our firewood.

We are driven hard with a yoke on our neck,

We are weary but are given no rest.

We get our bread at the peril of our lives,

Our skin is scorched from the heat of famine.

The joy of our heart has ceased,

Our dancing has turned to mourning.

Because of these things our hearts are sick,

Our eyes have grown dim because Mt. Zion lies desolate.

All: Restore to us yourself, Great God, that we may be restored.

The Speech of Zophar (Job 11:4-6, 13-16, 19-20):

"For you say, 'My conduct is pure,
and I am clean in God's sight.'

But O that God would speak

and open his lips to you,

and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom!

For wisdom is many-sided.

Know then that God exacts of you

less than your guilt deserves.

"If you direct your heart rightly,

you will stretch out your hands toward him.

If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away,

and do not let wickedness reside in your tents.

Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish;

you will be secure, and will not fear.

You will forget your misery;

you will remember it as waters that have passed away.

“You will lie down, and no one will make you afraid;
many will entreat your favor.
But the eyes of the wicked will fail;
all way of escape will be lost to them,
and their hope is to breathe their last.”

Hymn:

“From Depths of Woe I Raise to You” (stanzas 1, 3, and 5)²

From depths of woe I raise to You
the voice of lamentation;
Lord, turn a gracious ear to me
and hear my supplication.
If You iniquities will mark,
our secret sins and misdeeds dark,
O who shall stand before You?

Therefore my trust is in the Lord,
and not in my own merit;
on Him my soul shall rest, His Word
upholds my fainting spirit.
His promised mercy is my fort,
my comfort, and my sweet support;
I wait for it with patience.

Though great our sins and sore our woes,
His grace much more abounding;
His helping love no limit knows,
our utmost need it sounding.
Our Shepherd good and true is He,
who will at last His Israel free
from all their sin and sorrow.

Martin Luther (1523)

Tune: AUS TIEFER NOT or ALLEIN GOTT IN DER HÖH' SEI EHR'

The Second Speech of Eliphaz (Job 15:2-9):

“Should the wise answer with windy knowledge,
and fill themselves with the east wind?
Should they argue in unprofitable talk,
or in words with which they can do no good?
But you are doing away with the fear of God,
and hindering meditation before God.

For your iniquity teaches your mouth,
and you choose the tongue of the crafty.
Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;
your own lips testify against you.

“Are you the firstborn of the human race?
Were you brought forth before the hills?
Have you listened in the council of God?
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?
What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that is not clear to us?”

Hymn:

“I Want Jesus to Walk With Me”

I want Jesus to walk with me;
I want Jesus to walk with me;
all along my pilgrim journey,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.

In my trials, Lord, walk with me;
in my trials, Lord, walk with me;
when the shades of life are falling,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.

African-American spiritual

The Second Speech of Bildad (Job 18: 2-12):

“How long will you hunt for words?
Consider, and then we shall speak.
Why are we counted as cattle?
Why are we stupid in your sight?
You who tear yourself in your anger—
shall the earth be forsaken because of you,
or the rock be removed out of its place?

“Surely the light of the wicked is put out,
and the flame of their fire does not shine.
The light is dark in their tent,
and the lamp above them is put out.
Their strong steps are shortened,
and their own schemes throw them down.
For they are thrust into a net by their own feet,
and they walk into a pitfall.
A trap seizes them by the heel;

a snare lays hold of them.
A rope is hid for them in the ground,
a trap for them in the path.
Terrors frighten them on every side,
and chase them at their heels.
Their strength is consumed by hunger,
and calamity is ready for their stumbling.”

Song:

“Nada de Turbe”³

Nothing can trouble.
Nothing can frighten.
Those who seek God shall never go wanting.
God alone fills us.

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

The Second Speech of Zophar (Job 20: 4-7, 20-23, 29):

“Do you not know this from of old,
ever since mortals were placed on earth,
that the exulting of the wicked is short,
and the joy of the godless is but for a moment?
Even though they mount up high as the heavens,
and their head reaches to the clouds,
they will perish forever like their own dung;
those who have seen them will say, ‘Where are they?’

“They knew no quiet in their bellies;
in their greed they let nothing escape.
There was nothing left after they had eaten;
therefore their prosperity will not endure.
In full sufficiency they will be in distress;
all the force of misery will come upon them.
To fill their belly to the full
God will send his fierce anger into them,
and rain it upon them as their food.

“This is the portion of the wicked from God,
the heritage decreed for them by God.”

Sermon Text (John 9:1-7):

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born

blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

*Narrator (Job 38:1-7) with Sung Response:*⁴

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:
"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
and rides upon the storm.*

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.

*Deep in unfathomable mines
of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
and works His sovereign will.*

Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone
when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?"

*Blind unbelief is sure to err
and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
and He will make it plain.*

Benediction Reading (Romans 8:18-25):

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the

one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Benediction Hymn:

“How Firm a Foundation” (stanzas 1, 3, and 6)

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
to you, who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
for I am your God and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen and help you, and cause you to stand
upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

John Rippon's A SELECTION OF HYMNS (1787)

Tune: FOUNDATION

NOTES

1 A musical setting of this text is in John L. Bell, *Two Songs of Social Justice* (#G-5671, GIA Publications, Inc., Chicago, IL 60638).

2 Some recent hymnals include “Out of the Depths,” a contemporary translation of this text by Gracia Grindal.

3 A musical setting of this text by Jacques Berthier of the Taize Community is online at www.taize.fr/en_article483.html.

4 “God Moves in a Mysterious Way,” stanzas 1, 2, and 6; text: William Cowper (1774), tune: DUNDEE

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