

*What Can I Do For You?*

Job 42: 1-6, 10-17

Mark 10: 46-52

Have you ever called out to God when you are in distress? Or when something is near that you want? Or for the well-being of a family member or friend?

Martin Luther was a student at a German university in 1505. While returning to the campus one day, a storm came up. It had terrible lightning and thunder. Lightning struck near Luther and he thought he would die. He uttered a prayer to a saint for his salvation. And he made a bargain – *save me and I will become a monk*. Luther lived and kept his end of the bargain.[[1]](#footnote-1) This last Sunday of October we call Reformation Sunday – a recognition of the legacy of Luther and many others – who sought clarity about how humanity relates to God.

My hunch is that this past Monday night there was a lot of “praying” going on. Maybe not “praying” in the form of disciplined effort as we share in the Lord’s Prayer. But a lot of calling out to God or some divine power or transcendental force.

The reason for the increase in these petitions was the $1.6 billion lottery. Did anyone hear make some trips to South Carolina this week? Lots of reports came out of people asking in one form or another for some divine intervention so that they could win big.

Have you ever called out to God? What are some of the times you have called out to God?

I called out to God when I went to visit a coworker and friend in the hospital on an afternoon. It was before I went to seminary and was a minister. Only a colleague. My friend’s 4 yr old son had developed meningitis and was in a coma. I wasn’t much use to my friend as we talked in the hospital hallway and I just lost it as tears streamed down my face.

I called out to God late one night. It was the first weekend of spring break and the daughter of good friends was in a car accident. One girl was killed, one girl walked away, one girl has some injuries that needed attention but the daughter of our friends was in a comma. We went to the hospital to visit After they had been there for more than 24 hours and with the likelihood it would be more days before something was known, we drove them home. We stood in their yard and held hands. And I called out to God. With anger. With passion. With uncertainty.

I called out to God last night as I processed the events of the shooting at the synagogue in Pittsburgh. I didn’t go out in the street and verbalize my thoughts and feelings. But the swirl inside of me was strong. God, God, God.

Maybe you have had occasions to call out to God. Job called out to God as well. Last week Jennie Sankey led us through a reflection of what our place was in the world. Job 38: 4 shares this: *Where were you when I created the earth?*

*Tell me, since you know so much! [The Message]*

Job’s words shared today speak of acceptance that is both satisfactory and unsatisfactory. God takes away and yet God provides. Matthew Gaventa, pastor of the University Presbyterian Church of Austin, TX describes the ending of Job as

*It's not the ending we want, but maybe it's the ending we need.*

This may not be the clarity we seek. But it is what was provided.

*God has appeared, God has listened, God has spoken into the gap. God has not answered all the questions. God has not repaired the breach. God has not undone the damage. And yet, Job has faith. Here at the end, I think Job chooses to have faith. Faith despite all of it. Faith born in this middling mess. Faith regardless of the outcome. Faith to move on. Faith to keep going. Faith to carry forward. It doesn't repair the cracks. Faith isn't something that repairs the cracks. It doesn't end the questions. It doesn't provide the answers. It doesn't make for happy endings. Faith doesn't put the world back together. At best, it's a patch job. But still, maybe it's just exactly what we need.*

This faith that Job had is like duct tape. It works in amazing situations. It was duct tape that allowed the crew of Apollo 13 to create the filters they needed so they could breath and navigate their space ship back to earth after they circled the moon without adequate power. And more recently it was duct tape that allowed the crew of the international space station to plug a hole in this state of the art spacecraft so they could survive until a longer lasting fix could be configured.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The gospel story tells us of another person who called out to God, this time in Jesus. Bartimaeus was blind. When he heard Jesus was coming down the road he called out. The crowd could have ignored him. That is probably the worst thing that can happen. When a person calls out and everyone ignores her. That is an awful feeling.

But the crowd did not ignore Bartimeaus. They told him to be quiet. Maybe they wanted to beat him up. But he persisted. And Jesus recognized his call. He called the man over.

But Jesus did not presume to know what this man wanted. Jesus asked him: *What can I do for you? What is it that you want from me?* Jesus wanted clarity about who he was dealing with. And because Jesus sought clarity from Bartimeaus, Bartimeaus could be clear about what he was asking for.

He knew he wanted his sight. That would mean he could no longer be a beggar. As a blind person he could be a beggar. People might ignore him, but they knew he was doing what he could. But as a person who could see, he could no longer fill that role of the blind beggar. He would be changed. Yet he was willing to take that chance. *My teacher, I want to see!*

We are in the middle of our Generosity season here at PHPC. A lot has changed over the past few years. Some of us call out to God feeling abandoned. Some of us call out to God with anxiety – things are different. Some of us call out to God with questions about our place of ministry.

This year the Generosity effort has been shaped around the MAP process: What is the Ministry Action Plan of the various committees? What is the Ministry Action Plan of PHPC?

To find our way, we need to identify who we are, clarify where we are going and mobilize for that journey. We identify that by ourselves we cannot do all that God calls us to. We need each other. We clarify that there are many needs in the world. There are many times we want to call out. Yet none of us individually nor all of us together can address all of the needs in the world. We focus on what is right before us and find ways to serve where we are.

That is what Job did. That is what Bartimeaus did. They called out to God. We call out to God as well. As we do we clarify what we need and what we can do.

Each time I have called out to God I have found assurance. Maybe the word is hope.

The 4-yr-old son of my coworker and friend who had meningitis died shortly after I visited them.

Our daughter’s friend in the spring break car accident came out of her coma. Today she is a healthy young professional.

I don’t know what will happen in our nation. But my prayer – and my actions – will be that we must hold ourselves and our society to a standard of goodness, grace, justice and love that is available in the world not because we are good but because God is good.

In this time of asking clarifying questions, ask yourself who is it that your trust? And how can you place your life and resources to serve that which will share the one you trust?

Thanks be to God.

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October 28, 2018

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Matt Gaventa, [Home Repair 101](http://day1.org/8290-matt_gaventa_home_repair_101), October 28, 2018. Day 1.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)