



What we are here considering is the more subtle and more terrible torment of sheer inability to find power in God to bear the pain or meet the situation."
| Georgia O'Keeffe, *The Dark Night of the Soul*

When God leaves you hanging

A Service of Lament

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Hung up on God

"There is a branch of Christianity that promises a cure for tragedy. It is called by many names, but most often it is nicknamed the 'prosperity gospel' for its bold central claim that God will give you your heart's desires: money in the bank, a healthy body, a thriving family, and boundless happiness."

| Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved*

"Has anyone seen God?" Jill. M. Hudson writes in *Congregational Trauma: caring, coping and learning*, Trauma can strike anywhere any time and the church is generally ill-prepared to respond." Many of us were taught that God is omnipresent, that the Divine was always around here somewhere, that God would come from up there if we just cried out. God was always within earshot and heard every prayer.

But, what happens when you expect God to be somewhere and God does not show up? When you are at your worst and You need to see God at God's best? When you are left holding the cross, left to suffer alone? God doesn't come but the questions do and they are many.

"I thought that we were in this together? This was not a part of the plan, was it? Did I miss a meeting? Are you there, God? It's me. Did You forget about me?"

We want to just forget about it, to put it out of our head and to put our well- laid plans out of their misery. I know that God told me to do this or to be here. Or, how could this happen to me or happen to me here? Has anyone seen God? I need to have a word with the manager of human affairs.

Something doesn't feel right. My life is not turning out right, not quite like how we planned. We don't want to talk about it but we need to address the One who put us up to this. And Jesus didn't make excuses for this; instead, he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matt 27.46, NRSV). Like the psalmist, hung out to dry, still Jesus, you and I are hung up on God.



Order of Lament

Enter.

Moaning.

Prayer of Disorientation

God AWOL, God absent, God distant, God far, far away from me, You don't come close to Who I thought You would be. What have You done to me? I don't know who You are. I don't know who I am or where I stand. Don't get too close to me, God. Keep Your distance. Amen.

Wailing.

Litany of Disgust

Leader | I gave You my hands and You let them pin me down.

Group | How could You do this to me?

Leader | I followed in Your footsteps and now You are nowhere to be found.

Group | How could You leave me?

Leader | I did what You told me to. I repeated after You. Now, not a word, not a sound?

Group | How could You not answer me?

Weeping.

Hymn of Desolation

"Were you there?"

Old Testament Reading

Psalm 22.1-2

New Testament Reading

Matthew 27.45-46

Hymn of Consolation

"I want Jesus to walk with me"

Homily "When God leaves you hanging" Rev. Starlette Thomas

Benediction

Second Corinthians 13.13

Silence.

Depart.



Were you there?

African American Spiritual

Verse 1: Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Verse 2: Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?

Verse 3: Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?
Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?
Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?

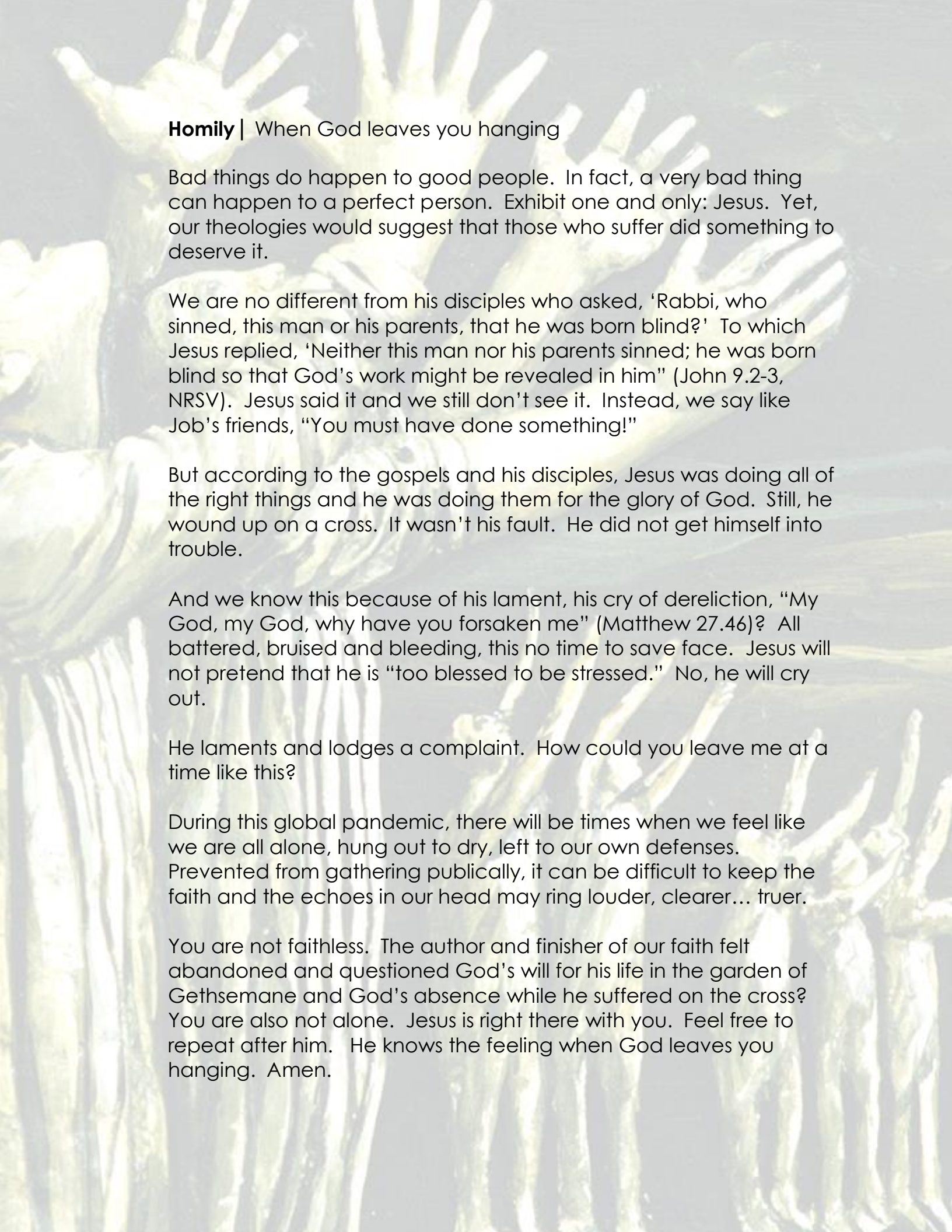
I want Jesus to walk with me

African American Spiritual

Verse 1: 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.

Verse 2: In my trials, Lord, walk with me;
in my trials, Lord, walk with me;
when my heart is almost breaking,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.

Verse 3: When I'm in trouble, Lord, walk with me;
when I'm in trouble, Lord, walk with me;
when my head is bowed in sorrow,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.



Homily | When God leaves you hanging

Bad things do happen to good people. In fact, a very bad thing can happen to a perfect person. Exhibit one and only: Jesus. Yet, our theologies would suggest that those who suffer did something to deserve it.

We are no different from his disciples who asked, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' To which Jesus replied, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's work might be revealed in him' (John 9.2-3, NRSV). Jesus said it and we still don't see it. Instead, we say like Job's friends, "You must have done something!"

But according to the gospels and his disciples, Jesus was doing all of the right things and he was doing them for the glory of God. Still, he wound up on a cross. It wasn't his fault. He did not get himself into trouble.

And we know this because of his lament, his cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matthew 27.46)? All battered, bruised and bleeding, this no time to save face. Jesus will not pretend that he is "too blessed to be stressed." No, he will cry out.

He laments and lodges a complaint. How could you leave me at a time like this?

During this global pandemic, there will be times when we feel like we are all alone, hung out to dry, left to our own defenses. Prevented from gathering publically, it can be difficult to keep the faith and the echoes in our head may ring louder, clearer... truer.

You are not faithless. The author and finisher of our faith felt abandoned and questioned God's will for his life in the garden of Gethsemane and God's absence while he suffered on the cross? You are also not alone. Jesus is right there with you. Feel free to repeat after him. He knows the feeling when God leaves you hanging. Amen.

A painting depicting a religious scene. In the foreground, a priest in a white cassock is shown from the waist up, with his hands raised in a gesture of blessing. The background shows a group of people, also with their hands raised, suggesting a communal prayer or a church service. The overall style is somewhat somber and dramatic, with a focus on the gesture of the hands.

Benediction |

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Amen.