

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes  
Santa Barbara, CA**

**Whose lament is Job’s lament? His? Mine? Or ours?**

**Thomas Heck**

Reflecting on  
**Job 7:1-4, 6-7; 1 Cor 9:1-9, 16-19, 22-23; Mk 1:29-39**

**February 4, 2018 – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**O**ur Beatitudes Community is participating in a large movement to make Catholicism, and the Bible readings we use in our Lectionary in particular, as inclusive as possible. We do this by subscribing to and using a revised, *Comprehensive Catholic Lectionary*, at [www.inclusivelectionary.org](http://www.inclusivelectionary.org).

Honestly, in the light of 500 years of Protestantism, what would Martin Luther have made of our electronic means of publication and dissemination? worldwide, instant, and in any language?

Luther started small. His earliest German-language hymnals were tiny—about 3x5”, but filled with a revolutionary new repertoire of songs praising God in the vernacular—in rhymed German verses. Here’s a sample – the wood-block score with typeset text of “Ein feste Burg” as it

appears in *Geistliche Lieder auff’s new gebessert* (Wittenberg, 1533).

The *Inclusive Lectionary* we are using, I think it’s safe to say, is a work in progress, open to reconsideration. Its goals are:

1. to include every significant story about women in the Bible not already included in the canonical Sunday Lectionary,”
2. To eliminate exclusive language for God and human beings, and
3. To educate readers and communities to a spectrum of Biblical theologies.

I believe that most of us support these goals and sometimes may even find them fascinating. I have already begun to notice thought-provoking changes in the “inclusive” texts we are now using. They can be quite a contrast with the *New American Bible* (NAB) first published in 1970, whose not-so-new readings are still being proclaimed today in Catholic parishes nationwide.

In today’s Gospel, for instance, we heard a snippet of revisionism in the alternate reading for what Simon’s mother did when Jesus raised her up: “She began to serve (to deacon) them.” Hmmm. To deacon may not be a proper verb, but it makes its point.

A more sweeping revision is found in our first reading—from the *Book of Job*. Let’s compare the NAB version with the “inclusive” reading we just heard a few moments ago. You’ll notice in this



line-by-line comparison how the lament of Job, originally spoken in *his own anguished voice*, has been made collective rather than individual. We may wonder, why? What's wrong with having us hear "a discouraged man sing a discouraged song?" Is a collective voice always more desirable? Let's ponder this as we listen to both versions of Ch. 7—first the Catholic Lectionary version (*italicized*), then the inclusive version (in standard type):

*Job spoke, saying:*

*Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?*

Is not human life on earth a hard service?

*Are not his days those of hirelings?*

Are not our days like the days of field workers?

*He is a slave who longs for the shade,*

Like a laborer longing for the shade,  
*a hireling who waits for his wages.*

A hired hand who waits for wages.

*So I have been assigned months of misery,*

We have months of futility assigned to us,  
*and troubled nights have been allotted to me.*

Then when evening falls,

troubled nights can be our lot.

*If in bed I say, "When shall I arise?"*

While in bed we toss and wonder,

"When will it be day that we may rise?"

*I am filled with restlessness until the dawn. . .*

We are filled with restlessness until dawn. . .  
*My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle;*

Then, our days are swifter than a  
weaver's shuttle

*they come to an end without hope.*

And can come to an end without hope.

*Remember that my life is like the wind;*

Remember that our life is but a breath.

*I shall not see happiness again.*

We may not see happiness again.

We may well ask ourselves if the original lament, in Job's own voice, is not more soulful,

more credible, than the collective version put out by the Women's Ordination Conference. I won't presume to answer for our community, but for myself, I would certainly prefer to let Job have his own singular voice. By the same token, I would not take a woman's declaration (like Mary's *Magnificat*) and collectivize it! I hope and believe that the new *Comprehensive Lectionary* will remain a work in progress until we get things right (if we ever do)! After all, *reception* is a vital part of the dynamic involved in creating good liturgies.

One of the real advantages to reworking the lectionary can be *restorative* – returning to public proclamation the "lost sheep," the passages that were suppressed before. And we have a terrific example of it in the second reading, from Chapter 9 of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

The standard Catholic lectionary *omits verses 1-6* of Ch. 9: precisely what the *Comprehensive Lectionary* restores! Can you guess why the USCCB doesn't want to trouble us with these ideas? After the first few verses asserting his authentic apostleship, Paul writes:

Although I may not be an apostle for others, I certainly am for you! I was sent to preach the Good News to you; so *you* are the seal of my apostleship in the Christ.

My defense against those who would pass judgment on me for receiving hospitality and support is this: *Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to travel with our wives as do the rest of the apostles, and Peter, and the siblings of Jesus?* Is it only myself and Barnabas who do not have these rights?

Imagine how those verses might have called into question the discipline of priestly celibacy! What the Catholic Bishops decided that we *should* hear in churches this weekend, from First Corinthians 9, starts ten verses later, with v. 16:

Brothers and sisters: If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it! . . . (etc.)

Returning to the *Comprehensive Lectionary* and its reception in this community: I would like to suggest that we are *all* in a *state of becoming* rather than just *being*. Not only our sacred books, but we ourselves (the people, the faithful) should be understood as works-in-progress. We and our Lectionary haven't "arrived," and probably won't in this lifetime.

So let us pray. . . When I raise my hands, kindly repeat after me:

**May God keep us humble.** [repeat]

As we grow in age, grace, and wisdom, it might be helpful for us to imagine "parenting ourselves." Are we not always (in some sense) our own children? Are we not, at least sometimes, a bit impatient? Can we take a deep breath and give ourselves a nice "time out" when we need one?

**Let's hope so . . .** [repeat]

There's a wonderful lyric about "going on forever" in *The Surrey with the fringe on top*. It makes eternal life on this earth sound awfully nice:

The wind'll whistle as we rattle along,  
The cows'll moo in the clover;  
The river will ripple out a whispered song  
And whisper it over and over:  
Don't you wish y'd go on forever?  
Don't you wish y'd go on forever?  
Don't you wish y'd go on forever and y'd never stop?  
In that shiny little surrey with the fringe on the top.

In our advancing years, gifted with music and grace and wisdom, can we be content knowing that we are *not* going to "go on forever?" Can we live with the idea of merely having temporary possessions and fleeting opinions in borrowed time? Is it OK *not* to "fix everything" within reach in our lifetimes? Will we have the wisdom sometimes—just sometimes—to "leave well enough alone"?

**Let's hope so . . .** [repeat]

**Amen . . .** [repeat]