



Sorrow, Beauty, and the Mystery of God's Love: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary's Wisdom Texts

AMY C. SCHIFRIN

Each new liturgical year is framed with a word of death and a word of life. It is a time to be born and a time to die. A time, a time, a time . . . It doesn't matter if it's year A, B, or C. On January 1, the Revised Common Lectionary's texts given to us begin with Ecclesiastes 3.¹ We can break a thousand New Year's resolutions in a lifetime, and we can wish for each new year to be better than the last, but when we hear this text, we know that we would be fools to think that we know exactly what 2022 or 2023 or 2024 will have in store for us or for any of God's children. All we know is that as this world spins on its axis, this pattern of being born and dying, of ecstasy and sorrow, of reunions and longings, of shatterings and mendings, of standing on precipice after precipice in food lines or refugee camps, county jails or gated communities, nursing homes or NICUs—all we know is that God is

¹ A distinct service for New Year's Day comes to us from the Presbyterian household. For those who celebrate Name of Jesus on January 1, there is a separate set of texts. See *The Revised Common Lectionary: Twentieth Anniversary Annotated Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, 2012), 8, 62, 118.

The Revised Common Lectionary selections for the Sundays and festivals of the church year tend to slight biblical readings from the wisdom tradition. Yet such readings are present in the RCL. This article shows the patterns of the wisdom texts and suggests how a methodical approach to these texts can strengthen our proclamation of the Word.

present and that God's beauty is hidden among our neighbors. And as long as we are granted breath, we are to keep on breathing.

As we begin to look at the wisdom texts² of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs in the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), it is helpful to remember that the RCL has its roots in the 1969 Roman Catholic Lectionary for Mass (LM), which has both an ecumenical and a eucharistic hermeneutic. In LM, the Holy Gospel is given primacy and the Old Testament readings were chosen in a "complementary" manner. The RCL follows that basic pattern but has provided two tracks of Old Testament readings with accompanying liturgical responses from the Psalter for the season after Pentecost. One track remains "complementary," and the other track is called "semicontinuous." The Old Testament reading and Holy Gospel in the semicontinuous track are not closely related, diachronically speaking. Clearly, they are tied to a particular Synoptic Gospel in its overall canonical sense, but not in a way that could be considered typological (as some of the complementary readings can be).³

In order for either track to be received as intended, it is not advised to switch back and forth, for then the synchronic sense, the weekly connections between the Old Testament readings, would be lost as they collectively work to give a fuller canonical picture that relates to the appointed Gospel for each year. As the semicontinuous track would give hearers a wider swath of the Old Testament during the second half of the liturgical year, this difference is particularly important with regard to the canonical wisdom literature. If, over the course of a three-year period, a pastor/congregation were to use the complementary readings for the three-year cycle, worshippers would only hear seven wisdom texts on Sunday mornings.⁴ However, if a pastor/congregation moved to the semicontinuous track just for year B, worshippers would now hear eight more wisdom texts.⁵ The wisdom readings in the complementary tracks are closely related both linguistically and theologically to the appointed Gospel reading of the day. While they can surely be preached on in their own right, in their lectionary pairings they set the stage in an explicitly christological way. The unity of the two testaments is made clear, and a preacher could surely figure out the intended theological direction. The focus is on the saving coming of Christ into our midst.

The wisdom texts in the semicontinuous track, however, do not work in such a direct way, since so much of their focus is on the travail and terror of life as we know it. As much as we may long for God to sweep in and rescue us in a kairotic flurry, it may behoove us at times to speak to the everydayness of life that longs

² The apocryphal books, Sirach, Baruch, and Wisdom are not included in this discussion since they are not as commonly used in the preaching of many Protestant churches.

³ For a fuller discussion on the RCL, its history and hermeneutics, see, Fritz West, *Scripture and Memory: The Ecumenical Hermeneutic of the Three-Year Lectionaries* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1997) and *The Revised Common Lectionary*, 185–198.

⁴ Worshippers would hear three more wisdom readings if they attended church on Holy Saturday morning, Holy Saturday evening/Easter Vigil, and New Year's Day.

⁵ If they moved to the semicontinuous track for year A, they would add one wisdom text, but if they were to move to the semicontinuous track for year C, they would lose three wisdom texts.

for a realistic survival—that is, breath, heartbeat, shelter, clean water, eyes that can still flicker with joy, and the cleansing tears that come from the simple gift of having another person listen—truly listen—to our sorrow. Human presence can mediate the presence of divine mercy as we simply stay and listen without condemnation, without advice, and without language that says, *You have to think the way I think and live the way I live.*⁶ Even if we do not fully understand another person's life, we can keep our mouths shut and our ears open. This is the season to preach those wisdom texts so the cries of the desolate will be voiced and listeners may even hear their own voice. By so doing we may work toward eliminating the flawed exegeses that cling to the cultural proverbs and axioms and present them as prescriptive rather than descriptive. For in this manner of misuse, they have become a deadly species of laws that are impenetrable layers of veneer for one scolding, nonbiblical proverb and its many variants, "God helps those who help themselves." On the cusp of a new era of healing that will take years to live into, if ever there was a time to preach from the wisdom texts, it is now.

As much as we may long for God to sweep in and rescue us in a kairotic flurry, it may behoove us at times to speak to the everydayness of life that longs for a realistic survival—that is, breath, heartbeat, shelter, clean water, eyes that can still flicker with joy, and the cleansing tears that come from the simple gift of having another person listen—truly listen—to our sorrow.

Actually, we can learn something by preaching the appointed wisdom texts that will also help us preach the New Testament texts year-round, for in listening to the Word of the Lord through these texts, we may learn again that we speak to real human beings who hunger and thirst for daily bread as well as for justice. In being honest about the human condition, we might then speak of the One who loves us, cares for us, and promises to heal us. Otherwise, our talk of the gospel as good news is simply empty. Then we might listen (*Let anyone who has ears hear*) not as Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu listened, but as Jesus listened to the cry of the lepers, the Canaanite woman, the man born blind, the woman with the flow of blood.

We can also take a hint from the voice of God as it sounds out of the whirlwind. How does God answer Job's lamenting? Not only with power, but with the beauty of creation. If God can look at Job, with all his wretched, oozing sores in the ash heap of his life, and still claim him as part of God's creation, it's also a word for us about how to look at the dung heap of all that we've made in this life

⁶ "Proverbs are not magical words that if memorized and applied in a mechanical way automatically lead to success and happiness." Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 50.

and throughout the world. To look at our lives truthfully (for the Christian, such truthfulness often leads to confession) is to see that even the most pious among us may have been angry at God for the mess we've made, and that even this is by no means an unforgivable sin. And the nonbeliever who might hear your preaching might at least see that they were made in beauty, may encounter a new discovery of truth—that is, that their life is of value. (Starting with first-article issues is never a bad option.)

Most pointedly, for both believers and nonbelievers (and both are in the pew), such preaching may open their ears and eyes to hear the cry of their neighbor, see their need, and respond. Preaching through these texts of wisdom may lead us to hear not only the negative side of the commandments, "You shall not," but what it is that we are capable of doing. What happens by such love is that God acts in the world. As John J. Collins reminds us, "The sages are concerned with practical results, not moral ideals."⁷

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and every manner of distress.*

Why and how these wisdom texts can work to bring about such love is that their language is simply addressed to human beings. As preachers, we have often been taught to read all texts christocentrically and that all of our preaching should *drive to Christ*. If for a moment, however, we could examine a component part of this pattern, just as when one is knitting a garment or assembling IKEA furniture—if for a moment we set aside our christocentric lens, we might hear the witness of the text as it opens our hearts to the depth of the human condition and to how we might be made new by the One who gathers us. And wisdom is that force who gathers us together. We might also think of such preaching as it relates to the second table of the law, for these words address all peoples regardless of their particular setting or religious confession.⁸ When preachers are so refreshed, they may well see anew how people in their communities are actually living, and may begin to speak grace as they've never done before. It will now be a grace that

⁷ John J. Collins, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980), 52.

⁸ Craig Bartholomew singles out the tenth commandment (Exod 20:17) and states: "Wisdom . . . is concerned with many aspects of life that cannot be dealt with by legislation but through persuasion, and so this is a natural place to begin comparing the two neighborhoods. Furthermore the tenth commandment—ten being a significant symbolic number in the OT—forms an inclusio with the first one and summarizes the attitude required for the fulfillment of this relational code." Bartholomew, "The Tenth Commandment, René Girard, and the Good Neighborhood of Hebrew Wisdom," *Canon & Culture* 9, no. 2 (2015): 255.

penetrates all the misdirected proverbs of this day that perpetuate pain, abandonment, and every manner of distress.

Such a nonchristocentric, yet theocentric, primary exegesis of the text might take away the ingrained desire of many preachers to set up Jesus to be the *deus ex machina* in the fourth act after they've preached themselves into a hopeless corner. Such "supernatural rescue" may often be an act of unbelief, for it denies that God is present and at work in this world even when the losses are greater than the imagination of our hearts could ever hold. Jumping to a cliché as to how God will make all things right takes away from the beauty that comes from simply living as a human being until, if we are so fortunate, there will be someone to care for our body with dignity and solemnity in our death. "Every time God closes a door, he opens a window" is neither in the New Testament nor in the Old, yet it has become a legalistic contemporary proverb that has left thousands in a dreadful silence. It is, of course, no better than the advice from the well-meaning counselors of Job, as people are left with no way to express their pain, and simply remain angry with the God who has not opened a window.

So where exactly are the wisdom texts in the RCL that we might consider preaching from, and preaching in a way that bears witness to the wisdom of God and brings God's beloved children to life in the midst of death? Here is the list:

Wisdom texts (non-Sundays) for the first half of all three years (A, B, C):

Ecclesiastes 3:1–13, New Year's Day
Job 14:1–14, Holy Saturday
Proverbs 8:1–21, 9:4–6, Easter Vigil

Wisdom text during Season after Pentecost, Year A, semicontinuous:

Song of Songs 2:8–13, Proper 9A (as an alternative to the appointed psalm)

Wisdom texts during Season after Pentecost, Year B, complementary:

Job 38:1–11, Proper 7B
Proverbs 9:1–6, Proper 15B

Wisdom texts during Season after Pentecost, Year B, semi-continuous:

Song of Songs 2:8–13, Proper 17B
Proverbs 22:1–23, Proper 18B
Proverbs 1:20–33, Proper 19B
Proverbs 31:10–31, Proper 20B
Job 1:1; 2:1–10, Proper 22B
Job 23:1–9, 16–17, Proper 23B
Job 38:1–7 [34–41], Proper 24B
Job 42:1–6, 10–17, Proper 25B

Wisdom text during Season after Pentecost Year C, both tracks:

Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31, Trinity Sunday

Wisdom texts during Season after Pentecost, Year C, complementary:

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12–14; 2:18–23, Proper 13C

Proverbs 25:6–7, Proper 17C

Job 19:23–27a, Proper 27C

**SOME GENERAL POINTS ABOUT YEAR B'S SEMICONTINUOUS
WISDOM TEXTS**

I want to turn our attention to the semicontinuous texts of year B that will be before us through the summer and fall of 2021 and again in 2024 and so on. While there may be no years quite like 2020 and 2021, there will still be people in the throes of grief and recovery in 2024, and surely there will be politically charged partisan divisions in both church and state. None of us can really see what the world, or our little worlds, will be when the lectionary rolls around to year B again, but the human condition will likely be very much the same.

Some of you will be capable of translating the Hebrew texts; many of you will be capable of accessing commentaries or journals. If you do read commentaries, please read some with differing theological emphases. You may or may not agree with them. Scholars whom you respect may come to differing conclusions as to the relationship between the voice of Wisdom and the voice of Jesus. You don't need to preach the argument, but be aware of it as you seek to proclaim the witness of the text. The important thing for you in your exegetical work is to have a sense of the breadth of interpretation. Texts are polysemous, and while we eventually make a wager in a particular direction,⁹ it doesn't mean that three or more years later something new won't be opened up to you as you come back to the text again. Also, some of you practice *lectio divina*, which is a helpful practice that can be adapted for preaching texts. I want to suggest some additional ways to listen to the texts and to open your life to the wisdom texts so that you can preach them with a sensitivity to the world of your hearer and extend the biblical witness to another generation.

Read through all of Proverbs and Job (and Ecclesiastes).

Even if there are no Ecclesiastes texts for preaching this season, these texts are in conversation with each other and, in fact, may have been included in the canon in direct opposition to the doctrine of retribution that is so prevalent in Job and Proverbs. You can jot down notes, but you don't have to (that will come later). Each of these books is a mix of poetry and prose, and realizing that difference in genre will help when you approach individual pericopes. After you have read through all of them, read through the chosen pericopes aloud. You know about canonical

⁹ Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 101.

exegesis and textual exegesis, but there is also an oral/aural exegesis that draws us into the witness of the text, since the text was not merely written to be read alone in silence, but to be proclaimed in the assembly. Speaking the texts aloud, as well as speaking your homily aloud as you practice, may open more layers of understanding. Ritual scholars have long discussed how we know more than we can ever say. Sometimes when we hear the words in our own voices, we discover something that no amount of study could have revealed. Your task then as the preacher will be to have the courage to speak it.

Assemble a written “road map.”

A generation ago you might have used a Bible, a copier, scissors, and tape to make a singular map of the appointed texts. These days, you can just conjure them up on your computer. I suggest you still print, tape, and lay them out on a table so they resemble a large road map that has been unfolded. Use some colored pencils and start reading again and making notes on your wisdom map. You might write in large letters at the top of your map, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” so that these words are in conversation with all of your words. Then begin to ask questions about how the texts relate to one another and how they sound as they are juxtaposed with our lives in the early twenty-first century.

Do the texts agree with or contradict each other? What phrases or ideas are repeated? Is there anything in the text that you don’t want to hear? Is there anything that you say an unequivocal yes to? Keep asking questions of each text individually, and in relation to the others. It won’t hurt if you also ask questions of each pericope within its chapter as well as in regard to what you know of the whole biblical book. By looking at the text within its biblical setting, you tease out canonical exegesis. By looking at the text in its liturgical placement alongside the previous or following weeks, you tease out a calendrical exegesis. (If you do this during the first half of the year, you will also want to include all the texts of the day in your map because understanding the diachronic relationship provides a most important clue as to why a particular text is included on a particular week in a particular year.)

If you delay some of those proclamatory destinations until you’ve done your concentrated, detailed, oral/aural work with the appointed text, there is a far better chance that you will hear the true scriptural echoes and not simply add to the common religious platitudes that are often pulled from the witness of the appointed text.

The margins of your map will have particular purpose as well. You’ve waited to jump into christological threads. Now you can frame your map with all those New Testament echoes of wisdom. The whole canon *is* at your disposal when you

are preaching. Scripture does interpret Scripture, and just as there are times to wait, there are also times to cease waiting and to proclaim. If you delay some of those proclamatory destinations until you've done your concentrated, detailed, oral/aural work with the appointed text, there is a far better chance that you will hear the true scriptural echoes and not simply add to the common religious platitudes that are often pulled from the witness of the appointed text.

A FEW SPECIFICS ABOUT YEAR B'S SEMICONTINUOUS WISDOM TEXTS

Having ruminated together about some wider patterns and overarching preparatory tasks, I offer here a few thoughts on texts given to us in the semicontinuous track of year B, with the hope that they will not stifle your own homiletic imagination but will help you to be open to hearing the voice of God in healing and beautiful ways as you prepare your sermons.

Song of Songs 2:8–13, Proper 17B

It's not just Proverbs 8 that has a long history; so does the Song of Songs. This particular pericope is quite unusual for the RCL in that it appears with different ritual placement in years A and B, both in the semicontinuous track. Like a diamond held first in the morning sun and then at noonday, its calendrical setting affects how the light shines through it. How does it relate to its setting as a liturgical reflection in the midst of thirteen weeks of readings from Genesis in semicontinuous year A as compared to its placement in the monarchical setting in year B? The previous weeks in year B were texts from 2 Samuel and then 1 Kings. Song of Songs in year B serves as a transition to three consecutive weeks of Proverbs. Such a question may not come to mind as quickly as whether Song of Songs is about Christ and his church, YHWH and Israel, a bride and a groom, or two lovers. Is it an allegory, or to be taken literally, or to be analyzed performatively or by a number of other means? Whose voices are singing this song into our ears? After pondering such things, asking the question about liturgical placement may just cause that diamond to turn in such a way that one more beautiful fragment of truth will shine through.¹⁰

Proverbs 22:1–23, Proper 18B; Proverbs 1:20–33, Proper 19B; Proverbs 31:10–31, Proper 20B

Proper 18B introduces a collection of sayings, a particular genre of speech with ethical connotations. They speak to our emotions as well as our actions, and in this particular passage you could easily draw threads to the commandments as well as

¹⁰ When you are open to such connections, do not be surprised if you meet others who have drawn similar pathways on their maps. See Kathryn Imray, "Love Is (Strong as) Death: Reading the Song of Songs through Proverbs 1–9," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (October 2013): 649–665.

to the Psalter. While some of these proverbs may have a history in Egypt, this does not diminish their descriptive power when it comes to being human. These are not prescriptive moral injunctions to be used in every circumstance, for proverbs have a history that comes from observation and reflection. They are not just pithy statements that tell what one should or must do, but “tools for interpreting present and future life stories,” that often arise from “narrative patterns in life.”¹¹ There is constant concern for the neighbor. How you preach these may reveal just as much about you or maybe even more than about those who wrote and collected them. They are not merely admonitions that can be applied universally. This is easy for us to forget because of the unified manner in which they are presented to us as successive verses in chapters in a biblical book.¹² As with many texts, these would have been spoken again and again before they were written, so it pays to speak them again in your sermon preparation, for more than one layer of meaning can often be revealed through the interplay of reflection and inflection. What might Wisdom’s voice sound like in chapter 1? Certainly the tone would be quite different from the sweetness of chapter 2 of the Song of Songs.

In Proper 19B, Proverbs 1:20–33, we are introduced to Wisdom as she cries out in the streets as a prophet would do. Her voice cries out to all, regardless of their religious inclinations. Structurally, this passage is a speech rather than a collection of sayings as in chapter 22. Through Wisdom’s voice, God is calling the world to Godself, seeking to protect us when we have followed wayward paths. The consequences of human disobedience are not always immediately visible to us, but they are to God.

The last consecutive week brings us to Proper 20B, Proverbs 31:10–31, which we know as an acrostically structured description of one often called “a woman of substance.” Just as the first chapter of Proverbs introduced us to a way in which God speaks into the world, so now this final chapter pictures a woman who, according to the wisdom of the day, lives rightly. If we understand this portrait to be one of description rather than prescription, we may find it more enlightening than if we only saw the framework of a wife who is consigned to hard work while her husband sips coffee at the equivalent of the local cafe, chafing when we realize that he is able to do so thanks to the dowry he received.

She is proficient at making both domestic and commercial decisions, physically formidable (vv. 16–17), economically judicious (vv. 18, 24), helpful, compassionate, and, above all, wise (vv. 20, 26). Is this passage descriptive of a particular woman, or of a type of woman that an older man of that day would commend to a young one who is seeking a wife? Either way, we know there weren’t the opportunities for a woman’s stability outside of marriage that there are now, at least in

¹¹ Alyce M. McKenzie, *Preaching Proverbs: Wisdom for the Pulpit* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), xv–xvi.

¹² “The fact that they sound like general truths, due to their impersonal, generalized syntax, and that they appear in collections, often without contextual clues, can make us forget that they are actually partial generalizations, appropriate for some situations and not for others.” McKenzie, *Preaching Proverbs*, 15.

certain parts of the world. So is there any way to preach this text now, when marriage isn't the only option for a woman to thrive and to live wisely and faithfully?

I believe there is, and even better than an acrostic, I give you the Duluth Trading Company women who are called "Wayforgers,"¹³ an apt term for women who are not only smart, industrious, creative, robust, and compassionate team players, but also dressed in clothing that carries strength, dignity (v. 25), and an expression of beauty that is anything but vain (v. 30). When their catalog arrives at my house each month, I learn about another beautiful woman who is a printer, rancher, sculptor, luthier, historic gardener, and more. What's even more impressive is that they seem to be filled with a joy that comes from living out their vocation with passion and dedication. If you understand Proverbs to be more contextual than universal, can you find a way to preach this passage that speaks to both women and men today who are seeking to find work and community that bring moments of joy?

If you understand Proverbs to be more contextual than universal, can you find a way to preach this passage that speaks to both women and men today who are seeking to find work and community that bring moments of joy?

Job 1:1; 2:1–10, Proper 22B; Job 23:1–9, 16–17, Proper 23B; Job 38:1–7 [34–41], Proper 24B; Job 42:1–6, 10–17, Proper 25B

In these long months of Covidtime, we may have been quoting Job without even knowing it. Human suffering, injustice, inequity, and both raging and suppressed grief predate 2020 and will be with us until life on this earth meets its end. Each of you may live in a community that has been grasped by grief and horror even apart from a pandemic. Other contagions have caused death and sorrow: systemic racism, unbridled greed that rapes the natural beauty of the land, sweeping wildfires that are increasing due to climate change. Then there have been people fighting kidney failure and cancer, maternal mortality and childhood leukemia. There is no end to all that makes us weary. If you think I'm prepping you to preach on Ecclesiastes, well, good. It's worth reading alongside Job.

These four pericopes will bring you as a silent listener to conversations that include the Lord, the *satan*, the friends of Job, and Job himself. If we sit long with Job in that ash heap that our own bodies begin to itch and ache, long enough to get a glimmer of the sort of pain that makes a person unrecognizable to herself, as happens when one dares look into a mirror after a long illness, especially an illness that makes the body waste away—then after such listening, we might engage all

¹³ Duluth Trading Co., "Duluth's Wayforgers," <https://www.duluthtrading.com/duluth-women.html?feature=hp5>.

the participants who speak with Job in our own conversations and see where that leads. I believe that in such conversations we won't find easy answers, universal platitudes, or prescriptions for our despair, like an opioid promise to vanquish our pain. For underneath the driving physical pain, and the emotional pain of watching our life and livelihood turn into ash, lie larger theological questions: Are we getting what we deserve? Why are we being attacked? And can this ever come to a good end? As long as we, like Job and his companions, hold on to a doctrine of retribution, we will always be looking to blame someone for our sorrows until, like Job, we aim our anger at God.

By the time the narrative arrives at the second chapter, God and the *satan*¹⁴ have already had one conversation, after which Job lost his oxen, donkeys, sheep, camels, and all but one of his servants. Then he learns of the death of his children. In his next acts, he exposes the vulnerability and distress he is already experiencing as he tears his robe and shaves his head before falling to the ground to worship, a universal position of submission. Job is not unlike families today who have lost their homes, their livelihoods, and numerous loved ones through the tyranny and greed of leaders who act like a *satan* but seek to be worshipped as gods; such families linger for years in refugee camps, having survived journeys that stripped them bare before they, too, collapse. We know there has never been a time when people have not suffered in the way of Job. In chapter 2, we hear, unimaginably, that things will get even worse.

Seven days later (Proper 23B) we hear Job again after he has endured twenty chapters of his friends' advice. It hasn't helped. Their stated intentions were to bring him comfort. ("With friends like that, who needs enemies?") Job keeps asserting his innocence and has been prepping his case like a defense lawyer. If, indeed, you preach on these words of Job, make sure you read those intervening chapters, for they will inform you as to all that's wrong with the doctrine of retribution. There may even be more people who believe in it than believe in God, as millions upon millions have believed the death-dealing proverb "You made your bed. Now lie in it."

Finally, after the trio of friends becomes a quartet with the addition of long-winded Elihu, defender of the Almighty like a new seminarian in the face of a world or God he does not truly understand, God enters (Proper 24B). Rather than answer as a prosecutor, however, God answers as if enacting the words of the prophet Isaiah, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways" (Isa 55:8). God answers from a theophanic whirlwind and speaks to Job with the force of one who was able to separate night from day and dry land from water. God speaks to Job as only the creator of all could, and so it is that the God who could take a handful of dust and breathe into its newly formed nostrils the breath of life could now take Job, who is no more alive than a pile of bones (Ezekiel 37), and give him a new life as well.

¹⁴ "One thing to remember is that this is the author speculating about what is happening in heaven. The writer of these words has not witnessed any of this conversation. It comes from his imagination. It may tell more about the author and his experience than it does about God." Daniel J. Simundson, "What Every Christian Should Know about Job," *Word & World* 31, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 352.

We never find out exactly what causes Job to repent (Proper 25B) or what exactly that might have meant in his context. For reasons we will never know or comprehend, Job, in his suffering, did not lose his faith (his anger being a true expression of his faith), though he couldn't always sense God's presence. Pain will do that to most of us. In these days, that might be what we need most to say. And while I've never been one to believe there actually was a singular man named Job who walked this earth, I do believe there have been thousands upon thousands of Jobs who have so traveled, seeking to be faithful in the midst of more distress than I want to imagine. This is where wisdom is born again and again. The human community is left with this mystery of suffering, even as we trust in God's unending love. ⊕

AMY C. SCHIFRIN is President Emeritus of the North American Lutheran Seminary and currently serves as Associate Professor of Liturgy and Homiletics at NALS and at Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, Pennsylvania. She is a member of the Consultation on Common Texts.