

“Do Not Be Afraid”

Tuesday 02 December 2003

Job 23.2-10

James Jones sometimes tells a story from his own life about what he calls a “necessary distance” between us and God on occasions. A few years ago he was walking past the small school at the bottom of the road where he lived, while the kids were playing. Through the six-foot-high wall he heard a child crying inconsolably. One of the teachers was trying to comfort the child, but to no avail. And then James Jones realised that the little girl crying was his own daughter. Part of him wanted to leap over the wall and grab her, to hold her in his arms and reassure her that everything would be all right. But he knew that he could do no such thing. If every time she was hurt he catapulted himself into her life to help her, how would she grow? How would she learn to trust other people? Or find the resources within her which are an important part of human maturity? How would she learn to trust God if her

daddy was always there? So, with a heavy heart, he walked on by. He still loved her, but at that time there was a necessary distance between them both - she could not understand, and he had to trust God that he was doing the right thing.

In a way far greater and much more grand, he says, there is sometimes a necessary distance between us and God. He's not given up on us, he still loves us. We do not understand what he is doing, but we need to trust that he does love us and that he knows what is best for us. The last three verses of our reading show us this: "If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold."

So what do we do when we feel upset and far from God? We need to prepare ourselves for these situations, because they will come upon us. Even Jesus felt far from God, crying out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

We need to immerse ourselves in Scripture, learning where we can find passages which can help us in these situations. Psalm 18 is a fantastic prayer of God's power and strength. Matthew 28.18-20 contains Jesus' promise to be with us *always*. Remember, and hold onto, the times when we have felt really close to God, when we have been absolutely certain of his presence and power.

The most spoken command in the Bible is "Do not be afraid" - we have nothing to fear because Jesus *has already* conquered death. We can look forward, especially at this time of advent, to that day when he will return, and we will be with God forever, and know him even as we are fully known. That is somewhere I know I long to be with all my heart...

Father, may your testing be not too hard for us to bear. Give us strength to hold onto your Word when we need it most. Hold us up so that we do not fall away from you. Keep our eyes fixed on the wonderful prize of being with you forever and ever. In Jesus' name, Amen.