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The Monster God

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Text: Job 7:1-7 [8-21]

When I was about 16 I read Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* for the first time. In this novella a young man discovers that he is slowly but surely changing into a giant cockroach. There is no explanation of why and no way that he can stop the process. Our lives, says Kafka, are unintelligible, the universe a senseless collection of random calamities which we cannot avoid. Life is absurd; we will never understand.

Job thinks Franz Kafka is an optimist. For Job, life is worse than absurd. It makes perfect sense—God is out to get us. God keeps us under guard, as if we were monsters, but all the time it is God who is the monster. We try to sleep to forget the pain, but God sends nightmares to traumatize us in the dark. God examines us and experiments on us and takes us out of prison only long enough to use us as target practice. We long for relief, but God insists that we struggle on against these diabolical onslaughts. We've been drafted as cannon fodder into God's army, and there is no way out.

As much as we try to hide it with pious happy-talk, down deep we agree with Job. Only a fool would want to merge into God. Dealing with God is like a beach party with Jaws II. What we want from religion is not community with God, but protection from God! Luther understood this when he talked about the naked God as a consuming fury full of wrath and punishment.

Job's friends were no help to him at all: "No, Job, you've got it all wrong. God is always fair. God always gives people what they deserve, so, if God is out to get you, you must have

done something wrong. Shape up and God will be good to you again.”

“Fat chance!” says Job. “I was as good as good can be and God still screwed me.”

Job’s problem was that he really agreed with his friends. Job’s God was one who rewarded the virtuous and punished the wicked, who gave wealth to the righteous and made the evil suffer. Since Job was a good, upstanding religious person he deserved blessings—and just look at what that monster God had done to him! No wonder Job was bitter and angry.

Luther once said that the kind of god you believe in is the kind of god you have. That is what happened to Job: he believed in a mean-spirited god, so he got Captain Bligh.

And us? We believe in a god whose job it is to reward our achievements and crown our performance with blessing. Our god, a god who rewards success and who punishes failure, can never be anything but a monster. Life under such a god is always like a Canadian Forces Base Petawawa boot camp. If we are to survive such a god with our illusions intact we need help. We turn to religion and expect our religion to protect us from our god. With our rituals and our activities and our theologies and our moralities we do our best to keep the monster under control.

But we cannot be protected. The real God will not be controlled. Is there any hope for us? A famous theologian has said that hope may come in learning to love the executioner. If I may be so bold as to disagree with famous theologians, I think that our hope lies not in the executioner but in the executed. Our hope lies in the real God, the God who was crucified, not in the gods we create in our own image. The real God, who did not explain the problem of suffering to Job, but who *became* Job, was abandoned to suffering, is the God of hope in this absurd adventure we call life. The real God is the One who is revealed in the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth and who will save us from the monster.