

In the name of the Father and of the \times Son and of the Holy Spirit

Sometimes we think it's our job to defend God—
to spare Him from our complaints and the assaults of others.

Sometimes we hold our feelings and emotions in,
afraid that if we actually let God know how we feel He'd think less of us.

But most often we simply act as if He doesn't exist.

When we have a problem with a classmate, a colleague at work, a parent or a friend,
we typically tell someone else about it.

We vent.

Venting, we're told, is a healthy way to get things out in the open.
It's a way to keep from storing everything inside so that it eats away at us.
Venting feels good—you get things off your chest.

But venting and gossip^{often} go hand in hand.
When we vent, we don't explain everything in the kindest way.
We don't guard our tongue or watch our words.

There's no self-control in venting.
In fact, that's what's so nice about venting—it's freeing.

Venting allows us to speak as we really think and feel—
whether it's right or wrong.

A conversation about a bad day turns into a bashing on whomever frustrated you.
All the flaws and failings of our neighbor are brought into the open.

We all do it.
We vent; we dump our problems—what are friends for, right?

Well.. Wrong. Friends aren't there for breaking the 8th commandment:
"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."
"What does this mean?"
"We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way."¹

Out of fear and love of God, we don't bash people with our friends!

¹ Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, "Section 1: The 10 Commandments."

In fact, we go over and above this by defending him, speaking well of him, and helping his reputation! — *even if he's harmed us.*

So if we can't vent to our friends, how do we free ourselves from this burden?

Vent to the Lord.

The Lord isn't above getting dirty.

He doesn't mind being put in a headlock,
Or taking the brunt of our complaint.

And because He is God—

He can handle it when we treat Him like He's not.

In fact, God even became man *so that He could die!*

There's nothing more *unlike* God than ~~that!~~ *dying!*

Today's lessons—both the Old Testament and our Gospel—

Show the lowliness and the humility of our God;
and the extent He'll go in order to hear our prayer and complaint.

They speak of God becoming man and wrestling with another man, Jacob, and *losing!* (Hos 12:4)

They picture God like an unjust judge, who, *though he doesn't fear God or respect men,* nevertheless knows enough to have mercy when asked enough!

To be clear, the judge in our parable doesn't give justice to the old woman simply because he doesn't want to be bothered anymore—it's not annoyance that wins him over—

He gives her justice because he's worried that if he doesn't, she'll come behind the bench and sock him in the eye!

(The Greek word used in the text literally means giving someone a black eye!)

The woman in our parable and Jacob in our Old Testament reading are both acting a bit out of the ordinary—they're aggressive with God!

Jacob holds God in a headlock, not relenting until God blesses him;
And our woman, that persistent little bugger, is so determined she'll punch the judge right in the eye!

Is that how we're supposed to treat our God?

Well, yes!

Today we're told to quit beating around the bush—
to quit defending God as if He needed our defense!

Today we're told to say it like it is, to demand of God what He Himself has promised for us—
Justice for our enemies, and mercy on us.

And if He won't give it to us,
we're to put Him in a headlock, and threaten him until He does!

And you know what?
He can take it.
In fact, He *has* taken it.

He lets Himself be held to His promises—
whether it's by being put in Jacob's headlock,
intimidated by a persistent widow,
or being nailed to a cross—
Jesus gives Himself over to be held accountable to His promises—
Promises to hear, respond, and deliver.

So vent to God.
Tell *Him* about how mad you are about your sister or your stubborn husband!
Tell *Him* about your unfair boss or your cheating friend.
Tell *Him* all that burdens you, all that weighs you down, all that frustrates you—
even, and especially, if it's God who really gets you down!

He can take it.
He takes your sin as well as the sin of your enemy.
He hears your complaint and turns your gossip and lying into blessing and praising.
He rights what is wrong and heals what is broken.
He hears your cry of pain and rejoices that you've finally come to *Him* for help.

He is God—but He's also man.
He knows your pain and your frustration, your anger and your sadness.

He *knows* them because He knows you—better than you know yourself.

So next time you need to vent, vent to God.
Wrestle with Him in prayer and confession.

Tell Him how you really feel and then let Him heal you with His Word of forgiveness.
Let Him explain everything in the kindest way—in the way of His Son.
Let Him remind you that you've been washed clean of all this in Holy Baptism.

He gave Himself to be pinned down to the cross
and by that cross He blesses you with life, salvation, and a clear conscience.

As the unjust judge gave justice to the persistent widow,
how much more will your Lord give *His* justice to you?
Go, you are free.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit