Jack was a Christian and a confirmed bachelor. An Oxford professor, he loved words, books, ideas, and imagination. Joy was a New York Jew, in a bad marriage, with two adolescent sons. She was 16 years younger than Jack and lived on the other side of the Atlantic.

Joy first met Jack through his writing. His books led to her conversion; her conversion led to a transatlantic correspondence. They wrote one another for a couple years before she traveled to England to visit and a friendship unfolded that was stimulating and mutually enriching. When Joy’s alcoholic husband abandoned her for another woman, Joy picked up her boys and moved to England to be closer to Jack. Although not without its bumps, their friendship deepened and Jack offered significant financial help for Joy and her boys.

However, one can’t stay unfettered in the old country forever and eventually Joy’s visa was set to expire. The only way she could stay in England was to marry an Englishman. Jack gallantly offered his services. And Jack and Joy were wed in a civil ceremony. Their friendship, while not deeply romantic, was deep enough to cause a 56-year-old English bachelor to marry a 40-year-old American woman.

Only a few months later Joy fell and they learned she had a brutally aggressive bone cancer. Something happened in Jack’s heart, as he later wrote, “Never have I loved her more than since she was struck down.”

Jack and Joy were wed again, in a Christian ceremony, at Joy’s bedside, and then she came home with Jack – presumably to die.

But, as Joy’s condition improved they enjoyed a handful of good years together. Jack wrote to a friend, “It’s funny at 59 to have the sort of happiness most men have in their twenties,… Thou hast kept the best wine till now.”

And then Joy died. Jack (who was born C.S. Lewis and was called Jack by his friends) wrestled with the loss, anger, grief, and hurt the only way he knew, he wrote. He wrote this:

*Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When we are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing him... you will be – or so it feels – welcomed with open arms. But go to him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do find? A door slamming in your face, and*
a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become.

Dear friends, we pick up Job desperately demanding a dialog with God only to hear only the click of the dead bolt and the emphatic sound of silence.

A little context...
No one ever said anything ill of Job. He was blessed with health, family, and faith. He was respected by men, adored by women, and a friend to children and small animals. But then breathless messengers bearing bad news rushed toward Job, crashing and piling one onto the other, before the first even had a chance to finish.

Fire fell from the sky and all your livestock was destroyed…
Enemies swarmed like storm clouds and killed all your servants…
Wind swept out of the sky and all your children were killed…

Job crumpled into a darkness from which he might never emerge. He found his place on the ash heap with those who knew loss ~ only to suffer an affliction of painful sores from the top of head to the soles of his feet.

Job lost everything.
Job’s wife pleaded with him, “Curse God and die!”
Job’s friends sat and wept with him, struck dumb by the enormity of his suffering. There were no words for seven days.
God didn’t speak up either.
Silence.
That’s the first 2 chapters of Job.

But then Job’s friends fill the silence with explanation and rationalization. For the next 20 chapters they defend their ideas of God rather than defend their friend. Job must have done something wrong because great suffering is caused by great sin. We get what we deserve. Everyone knows that’s how God has ordered the world. So, they encourage Job to repent and get right with God that his life might be restored. In chapter 22 one friend begs Job to return to the God from whom he must have walked away.

Which brings us to chapter 23.
Job raises his voice against the silence of God. In bitterness and bile, he voices his complaint ~ the Hebrew word for complaint here has the sense of rebelliousness. Job wants to bring his “case” to the “dwelling” of God. Job wants answers.

As one theologian puts it:

*It is the same question we ask when we suffer. Why has all this happened to me? More precisely, why have you done this to me? Job was completely righteous. Even God said so, twice (Job 1:8 and 2:3). So, Job has been saying to his friends*
and to God, “I did all the right things. You, God, have not played fair. What going on here. I need to know.”

Pascal, a mathematician, physicist, and philosopher of the 15th century, coined the phrase that God is *deus absconditus*, a hidden God, a God who slipped out the back door. That seems a helpful description.

For, from Job to Jack to Joy, from me to you, life is littered with decent faithful people who in trying to do their best with the limps and losses of life find God to be silent, distant, hidden…. 

Now. Some take the silence or hiddenness of God as a sign that God doesn’t exist or doesn’t deserve our devotion or attention. For example, Elie Wiesel, the Jewish writer who has spent his life wrestling and writing about the Holocaust, vividly recounts the death of God when he was a boy in a Nazi concentration camp. In “Night” he writes:

> Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence which deprived me for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust.

To deny or walk away from God because of the horrors of this life is one understandable option. But our text suggests a different response.

As the book of Job tells it, Job didn’t move away from God, rather God, by God’s own volition, moved away from Job. And our text recounts Job looking for someplace to contend with God. He’s wants to bring his case to court but he can’t even find the courthouse. And yet Job is seeking, searching, and crying out to God.

And in that Job is not an outlier.…. 

Crying out to a hidden God is a recurring theme in scripture.

The Psalm that we read this morning as part of our expression of confession and reconciliation opens with these lines:

> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? 
> Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

Or, in Psalm 88 the Psalmist writes:

> I cry to you for help, Lord; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Why, Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?

And, Christ himself, in the garden of Gethsemane and on the garbage dump of Golgotha, knew the forsakenness of God. Martin Luther described it as, “God striving with God.”

There are lots of other examples. 
You get the idea.
Therefore, let us acknowledge that the journey of faith will sometimes traverse through a valley of silence where God is hidden. You may look to the east and west, to the north and south, and it will seem as if God is nowhere to be found. Let us tell the truth that the hiddenness of God is part of the experience of faith.

And yet, may we not go silently into that good night…. Job writes, “Yet I am not silenced by the darkness, by the thick darkness that covers my face.” The emphatic silence of God didn’t deter Job. He continued to knock on the locked door.

Listen to how Phil Yancy in “Disappointment with God” frames it:

*One bold message of the Book of Job is that you can say anything to God. Throw at him your grief, your anger, your doubt, your bitterness, your betrayal, your disappointment – he can absorb them all. As often as not, the spiritual giants of the Bible are shown contending with God. They prefer to go away limping, like Jacob, rather than to shut God out…. God can deal with every human response save one. He cannot abide the response I fall back on instinctively: an attempt to ignore him or treat him as though he doesn’t exist. That response never once occurred to Job.*

Dear friends, no one sermon will capture the mystery and grace of God. And the Gospels proclaim that God spoke into the silence in Jesus Christ. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And there is more to come in Job. The next two weeks we will consider God’s response.

But for today, for this morning, for those who know something of the silence of God, let us not relinquish faith or give up hope. Let us not walk away in despair or disinterest. Let us not opt out. Rather let us….

- Search for God.
- Cry out to God.
- Contend with God.

For in the words of Isaiah,

*Truly you are a God who hides yourself, O God and Savior of Israel...*

Isaiah 45:15

Even so, come Lord Jesus.
Amen.