

Good Friday 2020
"By Faith Jesus"
Matthew 27:46

AND ABOUT THE NINTH HOUR JESUS CRIED OUT WITH A LOUD VOICE, SAYING, "ELI, ELI, LEMA SABACHTHANI?" THAT IS, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME (Mt 27:46)?"

A strange uneasiness settled over those who were lingering around the cross. Around the noon hour on that Friday, the blackest of all darkness had engulfed the land. It was dark as night. An unusual fear had gripped the hearts of those watching the site at Golgotha.

For three long hours, the terror of the darkness had hung, like a sentence of judgment, over Golgotha. It was now three o'clock in the afternoon. And, by now, most of the disciples had fled in fear for their own safety.

It was not difficult to see that He was very near death. Breathing for Jesus had become labored. Each breath was shallow, and each breath was a struggle. Finding strength in His dying moments, in unspeakable pain, Jesus cried out words which must have ripped at the heart of God. In a loud voice, Jesus cried, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?...My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?"

During our Wednesday evenings in Lent, we have read through the 11th chapter of the book of Hebrews. We have spent time remembering our leaders who walked by faith, and not by sight -- Abel, Noah, Abraham, Joseph and Moses. They heard and believed the promises of God. Tonight, we look at Jesus, who by faith entrusted Himself totally and completely into the hands of His Father in heaven, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken -- abandoned -- Me?"

We understand all too well what it feels like to be forsaken, abandoned. You may remember the first crush you ever had. Maybe in high school, even junior high. Maybe you even worked up the nerve to talk to him/her. And, you thought it would last forever and ever. But, rejection came, and then came the hurt. Maybe, even tears.

Maybe, it happened in marriage. This time really was serious, it really was supposed to last forever. So, you invested yourself in that relationship. Maybe you choose to put off college for him/her. You moved so the two of you could be closer. You worked to support him/her. You dreamed together of a house, children, retirement, travel. Then, death departed your spouse from you.

We know all too well what it's like to be abandoned – especially in this time of Covid-19. Social distancing and self-isolating, some for 14 days, has taken its toll upon us. It has distanced us from the classroom and our friends and activities. It has isolated us from our jobs, and with our jobs, our income. Maybe your loved one is hospitalized with the Coronavirus or a nursing home resident, so that you cannot even go to them, hold their hand, look them in the eye to tell them you love them.

It is easy to feel abandoned. The darkness of this valley of the shadow of death envelopes us; Satan, that roaring lion, roars. And, we are afraid and anxious, down to the very marrow of our bones. It seems every tick of the clock brings more uncertainty, and that uncertainty leaves us worried, because we can't control tomorrow, let alone the next minute.

Does it not seem strange that the eternal Son of God should feel forsaken, abandoned, by His eternal Father. Is that even possible? "I and My Father are one," Jesus said (Jn 10:30)." We confess this in the Creed, "being of one substance with the Father."

Yet, as Jesus hung suspended in untold agony on the cross, the Father abandoned His beloved Son. God, who is love, turned His back on the One with whom He is well pleased.

Up until now, Jesus had never known a moment without the Father. His Father had always been with Him. But now, with the absence of Father, the darkness grew even more dark. "My God, my God, why have you abandoned Me?"

In these words, Jesus tells us that He is suffering the punishment of sin -- utter and complete separation from the Father. But He was not suffering for His own sins. No! Rather, He was suffering for your sins. Your sins made Jesus endure separation from God. Your sins deprived Jesus of the loving presence He had always enjoyed.

That darkness is the "the wages of sin." The cost of your sins is Jesus' suffering and abandonment. There, on the cross, Jesus received the wages of sin which were due you. He was there in your place. Your sin demanded death. You deserved to be on that cross! You deserved to be abandoned by God. You deserved hell. It was for your sins He died.

The feeling of separation is part of the wrath of God against sin. It is the hell you deserve. But, Christ took your place. God's wrath against your sin was visited upon the shoulders of Jesus. It is no wonder, then, that Jesus cried: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" On the cross, Jesus took your place in abandonment, suffering, and death. The Father turned away, because He made Him who had no sin to be sin for you -- in your place.

Jesus was abandoned so that you might have the forgiveness of God, the Father, for our sins, all because our salvation was paid for by Jesus.

In a real sense, these words do not reflect doubt; no, these words reflect faith in God. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther called these words the strongest confession of faith in all the Bible. Even in the agony of the cross, even in His dying woes, Jesus knows that ultimately God is in control. Yes, He is dying on that cross, but only because the Father wills it! And that means He can completely and totally entrust Himself into the hands of God because God -- and God alone -- can be trusted.

The GOOD NEWS of the Christian faith is that because Jesus was abandoned by God the Father, God will never abandon you, Dear Child of God.

In this cry from the cross, we are reminded of the cost of our salvation, the price of our forgiveness. Yet, it also reminds us that we are not alone. In our darkest moment, God is with us. When the darkness overwhelms and overtakes us; when that roaring lion Satan whispers his lie into our ears that God doesn't care about you; when the world cries that there is no God, Dear Saints of God, do not walk by your emotions and feelings, Dear Child of God. Do not dwell on the darkness.

Even in the darkness, God is with you, and His will being done. He holds you in the palm of His hand and no one and nothing, not even death, can snatch you out of His hand.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" Jesus walked by faith. He knew that even in His dying woes, God was in charge and His will was being done. God heard the cry of His Son and raised Him to life again Easter morning.

When we cry to Him in the day of trouble, He hears and He answers our cry. No maybe not in the way, and at time, we want. But, in the way

and the hour of His own choosing, for, in faith, we know our Easter morning will dawn for us.