

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Lent 3 midweek  
March 10, 2021  
Matthew 27:45-46

### The Faithful Word

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 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?” (Matthew 27:45–46 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

The fourth word of the cross is an entirely different word from the others. It is a prayer to the Father as well as a cry of abandonment in the God-forsakenness of our sin and it emanates from the very depths of His soul. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Onlookers would have recognized the desperate cries of King David in his time of trial as the opening verses of Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?” (v. 1). If they knew the psalm by heart, and many did, they would have remembered David’s vividly prophetic portrayal of a crucifixion long before the Romans brought crucifixion to Jerusalem. “For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots” (vv. 16–18). Jesus is living and dying this psalm.

Thus, Jesus underscores the prophetic nature of His death. This is no accident, no simple miscarriage of justice, no quirk of history. His death in the darkness between noon and three is written large into every page of the Old Testament. It is the thread that connects the Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms into a unified whole. David’s sufferings are a picture, a type, of the Davidic King in His time of trial, of Jesus on the cross. The sentences are no coincidences; they are the plan of God from all eternity that the world should find its redemption in the death of the Son of David, the Son of God.

Yet, some who heard Jesus misunderstood Him and thought He was calling out for Elijah to save Him. So, they offer Jesus a drink of sour wine and waited to see if Elijah comes.

But Jesus doesn’t need Elijah’s services. He has come to fulfill Elijah and all the prophets. His cry is not a call for help, but it’s a cry out of the depths of our fallen humanity, out of our own death and despair. This is your abandonment, your darkness, your sin, your death that Jesus is experiencing in His own flesh.

He became the Sinner, damned under God's wrath, cursed on the tree. He is the murderer, the adulterer, the thief, the idolater. He is you. He willingly, knowingly, freely offers Himself on the altar of God's justice, taking on Adam's sin and rebellion and yours and making it His own. "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Oh, what blessedness is ours!

For sin drives a wedge between God and man and demands the sinner's death. It also separates man from man. Because of sin, Adam and Eve were driven from the garden and barred from the tree of life. Because of sin, we are driven into the isolation of self, the solitary confinement of our own selves curved inward. Sin would shut us off from God and from one another, leaving us permanently warped inward in a prison locked from the inside. In our time of darkness and despair, we cry out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" but the truth of the matter is we have forsaken God. We have turned from Him. We all like sheep have gone astray, each in his or her own way. God has not turned from us; we have turned from God.

So, Jesus, as the perfect Substitute, takes our place. He puts Himself where we are, and so experiences the silence, darkness, and despair, the "dark night" of our collective human soul. He enters into all the God-forsaken places where we cry out in despair, "Where are You, God? Why have You forsaken us?" Jesus utters the "why" question on behalf of all of us. Why does God permit this to happen? Why do the innocent suffer? Why does a just God permit suffering and a merciful God not prevent it?

There is paradox in this cry. For Jesus prays to a Father who appears to have abandoned Him in His time of need; the God who is absent and silent. He cries out into the darkness from His cross, and His cries trail off into the silence of space. And still, like David who prayed these words before Him, He prays. For the paradox of faith is that it prays to the God who is silent, who appears to have withdrawn, whose hand of blessing has shut tightly, who appears not to be there. Faith calls out "my God" and will not let God off the hook. This is faith that clings to the promise of God, when all that you have is the promise of God. Like the Canaanite woman who wouldn't let go of Jesus until He had helped her, faith trusts that the word of Jesus is sufficient.

Jesus' trust in His Father and His Word is at the heart of our faith. Jesus trusts for us. He prays for us. He cries out for us. He suffers for us. He dies for us. He embraces us so that we will never be forsaken in our time of need; we will never be alone in the hour of our death; we will not be abandoned in the Day of Judgment. Jesus is there, joined to us and we to Him in baptismal faith. He is with us, always, promising never to leave or forsake us.

Remember this faithful word when God seems to have forsaken you, on your dark Good Friday afternoon. Remember this cry of the Son of God calling out to heaven in your place, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?", and know that God has vindicated Jesus in His death, and He vindicates you in Jesus. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). You are reconciled to God in Jesus. You are justified in Jesus. You are safe in Jesus. And you are never forsaken.

Let us pray: For Your suffering in the darkness, for Your cry of abandonment, for Your becoming our sin so that we in You might become the righteousness of God, for Your taking upon Yourself our alienation, our division, our estrangement, our death, we give You thanks, most holy Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

(From Words of Life from the Cross, CPH, 2010)

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener