



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION: PALM SUNDAY, YEAR B, MARCH 28, 2021
ISAIAH 50:4-9a; PSALM 31:9-16; PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11; MARK 15:1-47

YOU ARE NOT FORSAKEN

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Sometimes I think those are the hardest words in the whole of the Gospels: Jesus, who IS God, crying out, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” What hope is there for *me*, if Jesus himself is forsaken?

In Mark’s Gospel, these are Jesus’ last words.

I encountered these last words in two different groups this past week. One involved a discussion of this Passion Gospel, and someone wondered about them: “Why would Jesus cry out these words? He knew the plan; he knew what was going on. He was God’s son!” Another reminded us that the first verse of a psalm, Psalm 22, begins with this very lament – *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me* – and it is as a very prophecy of the suffering Jesus would face, but the second part of the psalm is a turnabout to trust in God’s providence, and confidence, and

victory. And the Jewish people would have known that whole psalm and understood what Jesus was saying, that God is glorified in this.

And to the same question, why would Jesus cry out *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*, I found myself feeling, “No matter what, Jesus was also fully human, and in such terrible torture, I don’t know how he couldn’t cry out in anguish like this.”

There are many ways to read sacred Scripture, to discern how it is speaking in our own lives, in our own contexts. And crying out to God in suffering is something each of us will do at some time in our lives – truly, many times in our lives.

Because the second place I encountered these words this past week was at St. Peter’s Church in Seattle, with the Asian American and Pacific Islander community’s Litany of

Lament for the eight people who were killed in Atlanta, six of whom were Asian women, and decrying the increase in violence against this community and its beloved elders. But in the reading of a powerful prayer that night, the proclaimer's voice rang out not to the dead, but to the living who are suffering this targeted hate: "*You are NOT forsaken!*"

YOU are not forsaken!

God help us, in the midst of terrible times we're in: of sickness, and fear, and aggressive hatred, and senseless gun violence; here on the solemn brink of crucifixion on Good Friday and entering into it with the Passion in the Gospel today... we. have. Jesus.

And he cries out with his pain as one of us, human and vulnerable, and echoes the anguished cry of the Psalmist, and of us, when we face our own worst times: *Why have you forsaken me?* And yet he is there on the cross for the very love of us.

And, we know, Jesus is not forsaken. He is RISEN. And so YOU are not forsaken, no matter what may happen in your life. Because he is risen.

I hear Paul in Second Corinthians:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the

death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

Yes, on this Passion Sunday, we are turning from the triumph of Hosannahs and waving the palms to the devastating journey to the cross, and the human voice cutting to our hearts calling out "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" Jesus knows our pain.

But that cry of the Son of God does quote the Psalm 22 that he knows speaks to the rest of the story, for him, and for us:

*For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.*

God hears our cries. With God, there is always a way. Who would ever think that this terrible trial of the way of the cross and the tomb could be the way? But Jesus in his ministry had overturned the systems of the world, and he did so with his death. Because God is always with us, within us, beside us – even there.

The theologian Frederick Buechner wrote:

For what we need to know, of course, is not just that God exists, not just that beyond the steely brightness of the stars there is a cosmic intelligence of some kind that keeps the whole show going, but that there is a God right here in the thick of our day-to-day lives ... as we

*move around down here knee-deep in the fragrant muck and misery and marvel of the world... That is the miracle that we are really after. And that is also, I think, the miracle we get.*¹

Oh yes, that is the miracle we get. Not that we will face no suffering, but that Jesus is with us in our suffering, through his own fully

human passion, and through his fully divine, saving love that the tomb could not hold, and his Spirit that accompanies us through joy and pain.

My God, my God why have you forsaken me? These are Jesus' last words. But they are not THE last word, for Jesus, or for us. We are not forsaken. Resurrection is coming.

¹Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1966, p. 47.

Mark 15:1-47 *[As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.*

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days,

save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

[There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.]



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