

Good Friday

Matthew 27:32-54

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means place of the Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves casting lots; then they sat down there and they watched over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if He wants to; for he said, 'I am God's son.'" The bandits who were crucified with him taunted him the same way.

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" That is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran to get a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in half, from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's son."

Let us pray: When life scares us and we sense that our lives are in danger we feel forsaken. We wonder where You are and why You do not come and save us from all our troubles. We cry out with the Psalmist, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" But then deep within our souls we hear the truth, "I will never leave you, nor have I ever forsaken you. I will be with you to the bitter end." Thank You for making sure that we are never forsaken. Amen.

"Why Have You Forsaken Me?"

On Good Friday, Jesus was crucified upon a cross. While the whole world seemed to be mocking him, Jesus was reciting the psalms to comfort his soul during this season of distress, at some point he came to Psalm 22. Those who heard him, turned it into just some more mockery. It was Passover, and the hope of Passover was for the return of Elijah to rescue the people of Israel. They laughed as they mocked the seeming helpless man upon the cross. "Let us see if Elijah rescues him."

Any of us would have felt utterly forsaken, if we had been Jesus. Betrayed, denied, and deserted; beaten, tortured, and mocked; you could not get more God forsaken than this. But just like the psalmist realized at the end of Psalm 22, Jesus knew that he was never forsaken by God. “From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me. I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise You: You who fear the Lord, praise him!”

Jesus was not forsaken, Jesus was at the end of a long grueling race, and every ounce of his strength and concentration were being poured into his push for the finish line. He could hear God and all the angels already celebrating his great victory over sin, death, and the devil. Was Jesus forsaken? No! he was accompanied by God all the way to victory.

As Jesus was suffering and the world was mocking, Christ was asking God to forgive his tormentors. Jesus was pouring out God’s grace, God’s unmerited favor upon our world at it’s ugliest. Jesus did not return evil with evil, but defeated evil with love, just as he had taught us. Jesus had the power and authority to command ten thousand angels to destroy this world. But instead of destruction Jesus gave his life to give us a different way of living: The way of peace.

The devil was defeated, because Jesus although pushed to the limit by our sins against him, rejected the ways of hate and bitterness. Jesus rejected the ways of power and domination. Instead Jesus trusted in the power of love, mercy, and hope.

Death was defeated, because Jesus was not afraid to die. Fear of death, can motivate people to do all kinds of evil in the name of self preservation. Jesus knew that those who seek to save their lives will loose them and those who refuse to hold too tightly to their lives will find that they will live as if they will never die. Jesus trusted God. The love Jesus shared with God cast out all fear, even on the cross.

Jesus was not forsaken on the cross. The Holy Trinity could never be separated from each other. They are bound together by the unbreakable bonds of love. We are bound together with the Trinity by those same bonds of love. We can never to be forsaken by the God who loves us.

We all must face our own cross, and Jesus invites us to follow his example, to take up our cross and follow him. Christ did not fear the cross, he did wish there would have been another way, but I do not believe that we human beings would accept anything less than his tortured death. So Jesus drank the cup that was placed before him.

When we refuse to forgive those Jesus recognized as “not knowing what they were doing,” we are saying that the death of Christ had not been enough; we demand more suffering for sin. We refuse to accept Christ as payment for all the sins of the world, especially for those sins committed against us. But Jesus has declared from the cross, “It is finished!” The debt of sin has been paid in full, for everyone. For us to demand more is not only unjust but it is foolish.

When you are on your cross, and you are at the end of your life upon this earth, know that just like Christ, God has not forsaken you. God is right there by your side, just like he was with Jesus. God will never leave you, because love will not allow that to happen. The truth is that God will take you by the hand and escort you into paradise.

In the midst of this pandemic, there are those who mock God, and ask, “Well, where is your God? Has he forsaken us? You can say: God is right here with each of us. Those who believe will see him and marvel at all God is going for us. Those who don’t believe, will be blind to all God’s blessings, but still he will never leave their side and will care for them just the same. This is true in life and in death, and in life beyond death.

Remember, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” Is not the end of the story, it is just the beginning. What is planted with weeping, is harvested with great rejoicing. This is why this Friday is not just good, it is the best ever!

Let us pray: Lord be with all of those who may feel forsaken on this day. Help them know, like Christ that you have not left them on their own. Give those who grieve, comfort. Give those who are afraid, courage. Give those who feel all alone, your glorious presence. Thank you, Immanuel, God with us. Amen.