

West Valley Presbyterian Church
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“My God, My God, Why have you Forsaken me?”
Communion Meditation

It was high noon that weekday on Golgotha’s hill
It was a regular routine for the Roman soldiers to walk people up this hill called the place of the Skull...and crucify criminals there – from a distance you could make out the fact that the mountain itself resembled a skull (image) ...this mountain was indeed a place of death...

This day, a Friday, the soldiers had three criminals...(image)
Two thieves and one religious prophet guy... in the middle
The two thieves were known scoundrels – they’d been asking for this awhile
And then there was the one in the middle who had somehow managed to upset the Jews saying he actually was God
No Roman could really understand those religious issues the Jews were always discussing
Romans didn’t really care
The Jews were always arguing about something or other with regard to their law and religion – a waste of time as far as the Romans were concerned
Romans were polytheistic...couldn’t the Jews loosen up a little with all their talk about one God? It was so annoying...it caused so much friction...but it was what it was...

This guy in the middle of the two thieves, because of Jewish religious law
Had received the death sentence somehow

The centurions standing around were never too sure how long a crucifixion like this would last (image)
Sometimes people took a long time to die....
They’d leave them up there on their crosses for days, twitching and groaning on the cross with flies buzzing about their heads, exposing them to the elements and making a public display
Crucifixion was meant to inspire fear...and submission to the government

Nothing seemed to be terribly out of the ordinary that day....things were going pretty much as expected - until it got to be about 12:00 in the afternoon
It was still early – these three criminals had only been hanging there since 9AM - but at noon...
everything changed....because that was when the darkness came (image)

At first it seemed to be a cloud just temporarily covering up the blazing sun so characteristic of that place
But unlike a cloud that simply shades the landscape...this darkness grew thicker and more menacing until it was hard to see your hand in front of your face
People stumbled about as the wind began to blow;
People's eyes were temporarily taken off the dying victims and faces turned toward the sky. They pulled their wraps tighter, and some who had been watching the execution disappeared down the hill to find their way home.
As the darkness descended the crowd grew still and you could only hear the three men on the cross – their labored breathing...lifting themselves up and down against the wooden crosses to get the air they needed...

The darkness stayed until 3pm. It shouldn't have been a surprise to the Jews...God had said this would happen through the prophet Amos...
And it shall come to pass in that day, sayeth the Lord God, that I will cause the SUN to go down at NOON and I will darken the earth on a clear day." (Amos 8:9)

And then after three hours of darkness...at 3PM...the one in the middle...the one who said he was God...crucified between two thieves... cried out with a loud voice...
Many times in movies you have Jesus weakly saying this from the cross but that is not what scripture says happened.
Scripture tells us that Jesus' 4th cry from the cross was a THUNDERING cry!
Jesus cried out with a...LOUD voice.."

You see, **the translation "cried out" comes from a combination of two words. One means "to shout", and it is prefixed with the word "UP"- so it meant, "to shout/scream up."**
Sometimes this is called the "cry of dereliction" or the "cry of abandonment" .Eli...
Eli...Lama sabachtani...
My God..My God...Why have you forsaken me...? (image)

There's something about being alone in the dark that makes all of us afraid, doesn't it?
There's a deep fear in every heart of being left alone, in the darkness
Deserted in the night without a companion
Finding oneself utterly and completely alone is the worst nightmare cause...
I can get through anything as long as I know I am not alone
As long as I have a shoulder to lean on
Someone to tell my story to
Someone who will listen, and understand
I can get through anything, as long as I know, I am not abandoned

But to be alone...that's the worst!...

To have no one in the dark...that's the cruelest punishment...the worst torment
(image)
That's why solitary confinement is used for the hardened criminal
We are by nature relational beings
We are by nature curious and we generally want to explore new things
When we are alone, we have no one to check in with, nothing to explore and no one
to share life with...Being alone without a friend, a parent, a close confidante
That's the worst torture of all

On that day...as darkness descended
As Jesus cried out these words...
He was utterly and completely alone...in the dark...not just the darkness of the land
but the darkness of the sin of all humanity – descended on him

In earlier statements from the cross Jesus had cried out to God..."Father forgive
them" – Hours before... from the cross he was still addressing God as Father...
Abba...his parent and friend...close confidante
Now the word he uses to address God is not familiar and close
It is the word for God that comes from Elohim – a much more distant address

Jesus is feeling the abandonment, the isolation, the forsakenness
of broken sinful humanity right there...He stands in solidarity with any of you who
have ever looked up at heaven and asked "*Why God? Why aren't you with me? You've
forgotten me, you've forsaken me – this never would have happened if you were real...if
you were here with me.*"

Any of us who have ever looked up to heaven and said "Why?" or "Where are you?"
(image)
Every time you say that, or you hear someone say that...remember, Jesus asked that
same question before you ever did.

But remember this...
Its our alienation from God, that makes us question his existence
Its our sin that separates us from the glorious vision of his presence
It is the darkness of the world and our own fallenness that makes us wonder, does
God see? Does he care? Is he even there?

But until this moment on the cross, because Jesus was sinless, he never had trouble
tuning in to the wonder of God's presence
He was filled with the full measure of the Divine nature...full of grace and truth...full
of life and light and the joy of the Holy Spirit

He was one with the very Author of life, the God who brimmed and spilled over with
enthusiasm for all of Creation, the one who harbored deep wisdom and outrageous
love...

Jesus was connected to that reality ...hand in hand with that One...all the time
He called that reality Father...and it was
this relationship with his Father that strengthened Jesus daily
This relationship with his Father was the beacon that guided him, the very
heartbeat of his existence

For most of us, we've never known that kind of intimacy with God
The beauty and vibrancy of being in constant contact with YWH – the Lord of the
universe...
Think about that for a minute...
What must Jesus have been like – connected intimately with the very life of Creator
God - so connected to the Almighty the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...who
breathed the world into being...
No wonder his simple life born to peasants in an obscure village made such an
astounding impact on our world, dividing history in half.

Maybe you've seen some movies of the crucifixion...How many of you have? The
Passion was probably the most graphic...And, like the Passion
a lot of movies take a whole lot of time showing what the physical pain of the
crucifixion was like – the beatings, the crown of thorns, the nails
And that is there...no question...a terrible way to die
But I think, for Jesus
The greatest pain, the most searing loss, the deepest wrenching agony of the cross
Was expressed right here...in these words of Christ...when Jesus could no longer
sense the presence of his Father with him;

And this is when the darkness that covered the land, became the darkness of Jesus'
own soul...his feeling of annihilation, the loneliness, the despair as he holds the sins
of the cosmos; as our planet seizes in a kind of earthquake representing the spiritual
upheaval as God who is pure and brilliant took on the darkness of sin ; Jesus holds
our evil, receives our punishment, takes what we deserve which is death...and bears
it...

Remember please that scripture tells us that any moment Jesus could have decided
this was just too much for him to take and called on God to rescue him...
There is the connotation in some of the reading that Jesus literally held himself there
on the cross by an act of will...because he loved us that much...
At any moment he could have called ten thousand angels to rescue him Scripture
tells us...
No one takes my life from me...I give it up of my own accord, Jesus had said earlier.

In the Old Testament...way before Jesus... part of the Jewish law said that there annually needed to be a scapegoat for the people's sins so that the people could be forgiven and cleansed...

And the scapegoat was a literal goat that the priest and the people sent out into the wilderness. (IMAGE) The High Priest placed his hands on top the goat's head and said, "***upon you I place all the sins of all the children of Israel. All of the envy, adultery, all the lying, and all the lusting, all the sins are placed on you.***" Then they took the goat out to the desert, far away so that he could not make his way back to camp. Alone and abandoned this goat took on the sins of the people and died if not from the elements from the wild beasts. (image)

Unlike the goat who is forced into the wilderness, Jesus ***willingly*** takes on our punishment...our sin and our alienation from God..the punishment for alienation from God is death.

There...at the place of the Skull...Jesus willingly dies FOR us in our place... In doing so, he experiences that alienation from God that we have when we say...

"I just don't feel God's presence" OR "Does God care?" OR "Does God even exist?"

These are legitimate questions – Remember, Jesus asked them first before you ever did...

But there's more to the story than this.... Forsakenness is not the last word in this cry ...not at all...and that's what I want you remember...

What Jesus was doing that day when he cried out *My God My God Why Have You Forsaken Me*..... is quoting a song that every Jewish person there would have known...

It would be like someone whispering out the first stanza of Amazing Grace right before they died...If someone said Amazing Grace How Sweet The Sound...and that was all they got out...how would you finish?

And **the song that Jesus quoted was Psalm 22**...and it had a message because any good Jewish person would have known what came next...

The song that he quoted, written 10,000 years prior by David, tells us that God story never ends on a note of despair and abandonment

Maybe right now you are wondering, "Where are you God?"

Maybe right now you are asking, "Have you forsaken me God? Are you really there? Do you see me? Do you even care?"

Jesus knows what that alienation feels like – the sense of despair that comes when we don't feel God close at hand

But friends, so often we make conclusions about God and his love for us
Before we get to the end of the story
As Tony Campolo is fond of saying..."**It was Friday** (the day Jesus died)...**but Sunday was coming**"

I have this book here...and if I read the last page of this book right now...where it seems to end...I would think that's it...(some freaky ending)
It looks that way doesn't it? The last line in this book says....(blah blah blah)

In reality though...in order to make my point...I took out this whole section of the rest of the story..

Friends...this is the real ending...I'm holding it in my hand...
God holds the end of your story in his hand....too
God has an ending to your story that is not the ending that you may think
God's story for you never ends in despair

The disciples thought it was the end when Jesus died
But Sunday was coming...there was more to the story.
There were chapters still to read, there were more pages to turn
It wasn't the end...

If you are feeling abandoned by God right now...know that this is not the end of the story for you...hang in there...

Wait on the Lord friends if you feel today forsaken and alone...Sunday is coming
That's the song that Jesus quoted that day in the darkness

Although this song or psalm starts out with despair...it ends in hope...
That's what Jesus did so well, that we don't do very well when darkness closes in
When Jesus felt forsaken, Jesus worshipped God

When he felt alone in the dark, he cried out in agony, but he cried out a song because he knew that in the darkest hour, in the hour of his forsakenness, God would still come through for him...

And that no matter what...God would deliver him – that's how the song ends
Its starts with forsakenness...and ends with deliverance...

We're going to end in reading portions of this song - Psalm 22 that Jesus quoted that day...right now together

Remember this was written 10,000 years before Christ...notice the prophecy in it
Notice the move from despair to hope...from forsakenness to victory

God is a God of victory. He'll end your story with victory too if you trust him.
That's the power of the cross...

Let's read this responsively as we prepare our hearts for communion...Psalm 22 ...
Selections...

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

**Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?**

**² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.^[b]**

**P: I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.**

**⁷ All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.**

**⁸ “He trusts in the LORD,” they say,
“let the LORD rescue him.**

**Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him....”**

**L: I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.**

**My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.**

**¹⁵ My mouth^[d] is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.**

**P: Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce^[e] my hands and my feet.**

**¹⁷ All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.**

**¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.**

**L: LORD, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me...
I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you. (*that's us – the church*)...**

**P: He has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.**

**L: All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.**

**P: All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.**

**L: Future generations will be told about the Lord.
They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!**

Lord indeed you have done it for us on the cross. Help us to recognize that you were forsaken so we could be forgiven and set free ...so we wouldn't have to be alone in the dark... Because of your sacrifice and triumph over death we praise you today that death is not the end for us...not the end of the story but rather the story goes on beyond death to victory...to eternal life, and praise, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

As we take communion now, we pray that you would set these elements aside from a common to a sacred use. And may we truly commune as those future generations that this psalm you quoted talked about...future generations still benefiting from the grace and power of the cross...Lives still being changed because of your great sacrifice...the transforming repercussions of your cross go on and on down through history like a mighty wave that lifts us up and gives hope and victory and rest for our weary souls.... Lord today...Give us the grace to sacrifice for others as you did for us...And for those of us who struggle today, gives us the strength O Lord as you did to find hope even in the darkest hour as we trust that there is more to our story...that your story for us always ends in victory and triumph....In Jesus Name We Pray...Amen