

There's Nothing Cute about Advent
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Text Psalm 22:1-11

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

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning?

2 O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, and am not silent.

3 Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the praise of Israel.

4 In you our fathers put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.

5 They cried to you and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

6 But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by men and despised by the people.

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

8 "He trusts in the LORD;
let the LORD rescue him.

Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him."

9 Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you
even at my mother's breast.

10 From birth I was cast upon you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.

11 Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near

and there is no one to help.

Psalm 22, A Song of Lament, Trust

There's Nothing Cute about Advent

Yesterday I had a chance to visit with some long time members of our church, past and present. As stories were shared, there lots of “good times” – a idyllic childhood growing up on a Colorado farm. 30 plus years of studying the bible together. The warmth and care of West Valley community. But to be honest, there were as many or more stories of loss and sadness. Having to leave a beloved home and move into a care facility. A string of crises that came just as we were about to start enjoying retirement. And of course, there were stories about the way church used to be, and isn't anymore.

This is the stuff of real life. One of the most painful parts about Christmas is how we feel obliged to try and gloss over the pain. At the gym last week my friend Bill said, unprompted, “I just don't understand Christmas anymore. Why do we feel like we have to buy so many *presents*?” I felt a twinge of anxiety as he said it. Maybe you feel one too.

--Billy Graham once said,

The very purpose of Christ's coming into the world was that He might offer up His life as a sacrifice for the sins of men. He came to die. This is the heart of Christmas.

Dr. Graham's words may not be the stuff of warm and fuzzy holiday cards, but they do speak deep truth our souls long to hear. Like Will Ferrell's character in *Talladega Nights*, our culture loves to think about Jesus only as a cute little baby. But in Advent, we own up to the fact that he is the strong Deliverer – the only One who can free us from the control of sin and death – and that we need to be delivered! There's nothing cute about that.

This text is closely connected to the crucifixion, because it provides a prophetic vision of our Deliverer's suffering and because it was the way Jesus expressed his despair upon the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When Jesus needed words to express the fullness of his pain, his desperate longing for rescue, and his feelings of being utterly abandoned and alone, he found those words in a song Mary undoubtedly taught him from the time he was a cute little baby.

The Psalms, and Advent, are emotionally messy. What we do in Advent isn't cute. But it is real life. And real life is a real gift.

In our recent Adult Education hour, we've been exploring prayer. One way to grow in our prayer life is to pray the psalms. The wonderful thing about the psalms is: If it's in the Psalms, it's allowed! If the psalmist said, so can you. The Psalms put words on our feelings. They help us move from our head (where anxiety grows) to our hearts (where we can get in touch with truth).

The Psalms give us permission to tell God how we really feel.

Telling God how we really feel is called prayer. Anybody can do it. The Psalms help.

Verse 1 & 2

Why? Why have been forsaken? Have you ever been forsaken by someone? Have you ever wondered, Why is this horrible stuff happening to me God?

Verse 6-8

I feel humiliated. Have you ever felt humiliated?

We can pray this psalm for ourselves. We can be honest with God about what is happening to us.

But what if we prayed this psalm for other people? For people we know are feeling forsaken and humiliated right now?

After expressing deep anguish, the Psalm continues with an amazing word: *Yet*. "Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them" (Ps 22:3-4). We lament, yet we have hope. We doubt, yet we trust.

The Psalms help us to rise above either/or thinking, and grow into both/and.

I feel forsaken, yet I will keep trusting you.

I see others who cry out to you being humiliated and mistreated, and yet I believe for them that you hear their cries.

Vs 3-5 Yet you are enthroned. We remember how you heard the cries of our ancestors, so we trust you to hear us now.

Vs 9-10 Though I am humiliated, Yet I know you brought me into life and have been teaching me to trust you since I was a baby.

The Big Ask: Verse 11

Do not be far from me.

For trouble is near and there is no one to help.

In advent, we are amazed to discover that Jesus prayed this prayer on the cross, and by going to the cross he was the One answers the prayer. Jesus comes near. Jesus helps. Jesus saves. Amen!

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