

## **Forsaken and Finished – Good Friday – Matthew 27:45-46/ John 19:30**

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me”, Jesus cried from the cross. The cry of dereliction, and despair.

There is something rather moving about speaking on Jesus’ cry of dereliction, forsakenness, in this period of COVID19 isolation. Even more poignant to be preaching this sermon in an empty church, which would normally be filled to the brim on this most solemn of days in the Christian calendar.

The words “why have you forsaken me” are close to the bone, and perhaps will have a different ring for you this Good Friday, as never before. If you haven’t seen another human face in the flesh for a few weeks, you too may feel forsaken, discarded and alone.

I cannot imagine the weight of aloneness for our leaders at this time, our Premier and our Prime Minister who are in our hearts and prayers as they carry the weight of office, mostly alone.

As we read of Jesus’ last hours on the cross, the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ crucifixion preserve a little snippet of Jesus’ own language of Aramaic. It is a reminder that this is not fiction, but an account of an actual event.

*Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani” which means, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

No doubt as he hung on the cross, in the unusual midday darkness (incidentally also attested by non-biblical sources), Jesus felt utterly alone. His closest friends had abandoned him. Mostly, only the women were at the cross, and even then standing a way off.

And in the searing agony of dying, he feels utterly alone and abandoned, forsaken, discarded, and despairing.

I was shocked when I heard a UK spokesperson say that 20,000 deaths from COVID19 would be a “good result” for the UK. Like many of us I guess, I find myself glued to the daily stats of infections and deaths. As we watch this virus ravaging our world we can imagine the loneliness and forsakenness of people who will die pretty much alone, certainly without family and friends by their side.

But for Jesus it was not just abandonment from his friends that caused his anguished cry. It was not just the loneliness of death. But something deeper.

His words, are a quote from the opening verses of Psalm 22, the ancient song book of Israel, that read: *My God my God why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?*

These were originally the words of King David, when he was under great distress, feeling abandoned by the Lord, to whom he cries out in his anguish.

Many people have appropriated the words of this Psalm, to express their own suffering down through history. Imagine the woman living in isolation with an abusive husband, or the child with mental illness, or “those whose health is fragile” unable to see a son or a daughter at this time. Praying these words, would be an authentic way of expressing lament.

My God my god why have you forsaken me.

But Psalm 22 has a deeper meaning, as it is appropriated by Jesus, as he takes these words and uses them for himself.

One wonders, if in fact, Jesus may have spoken out the whole Psalm as he hung on the cross of Calvary. And if the gospel writers who recall these words, are indicating to us, that we should go to the Psalm and read it all.

Listen to vv 7-8,

<sup>7</sup> All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; “Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—  
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”

and vv 14-18

<sup>14</sup> I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; <sup>15</sup>my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. <sup>16</sup>For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shriveled; <sup>17</sup>I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me; <sup>18</sup> they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

No wonder some think that the Psalm, is a prophecy of Jesus’ death, so accurately does it describe the circumstances of that dreadful day.

But in it, also a new and more profound truth. For unlike David for whom it seemed as if the Lord had forsaken him; Jesus finds himself at this moment of his life, for the very first time, truly and actually forsaken by his heavenly father.

We know that God the Father cannot look upon sin. And as Jesus dies on the cross, he takes on the sin of the whole world; and at that moment he hangs there all alone. In that moment the Father does forsake him.

As the modern hymn writer, Stuart Townend, puts it:

***How great the pain of searing loss -  
The Father turns His face away,  
As wounds which mar the Chosen One  
Bring many sons to glory.***

The father turns his face away, and the darkness descends on our Lord Jesus. And he is forsaken.

At this moment we see the great exchange! Christ exchanging places with us.

Listen to the next verse of Townend’s hymn

**Behold the man upon a cross,  
My sin upon His shoulders;  
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers.  
It was my sin that held Him there  
Until it was accomplished;  
His dying breath has brought me life -  
I know that it is finished.**

Tim Keller succinctly puts it this way: “The Gospel [the good news] is that Jesus Christ came to earth, lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died.”

Or more fulsomely this 19<sup>th</sup> century writer:

*“Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. <Ellen G White>*

Or as the apostle Peter says: **<1 Peter 3:18>** For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.

This is the great exchange that takes place on the cross, recalled for us as Jesus utters these words: My God My God, why have you forsaken me?

They express the heart of our faith. That Christ died in your place and in mine, took the penalty for me, took the punishment due to you and to me; underwent the agony of separation from his Father, so that, my punishment being complete, and your punishment being complete, we can stand forgiven.

My sin on his shoulders, holding him there, forsaken, so that I am free and forgiven and restored, and unforsaken by my father in that moment.

The ultimate gift of love, his life for yours and mine.

But Psalm 22 is not all despair. It ends by turning to praise God for hearing the cry of his abandoned one and bringing redemption.

Listen to vv 22-24:

<sup>22</sup> I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

<sup>23</sup> You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! <sup>24</sup>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.

And ends with these words: vv 30-31

<sup>30</sup> Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, <sup>31</sup>and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

He has done it! These words celebrate the Victory won by the Lord in redeeming his faithful one. How fitting then that Jesus’ final word on the cross recorded by John is “It is finished”. It is finished, he has done it.

The price for our sin is paid, and Jesus’ death completes his work of redeeming the world.

He frees us from our sins, takes us from our past mistakes, cleanses us from our stains, and gives us new life.

All that remains for you and me is trusting him. Trusting him that he did that for you. That as he pays for your sins, you can be freed from your past, and forgiven for all your wrongs and you can start again.

God bless you this Good Friday.