

***“My God, My God”<sup>i</sup>***  
**Sunday, March 19, 2017**  
**Third Sunday in Lent**

 **Matthew 27:45-49 (NRSV)**

**The Death of Jesus**

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

And about three o’clock Jesus cried with 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 and got 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.”*

**This is the Word of God for the people of God.**

***Thanks, be to God.***

## [2<sup>ND</sup> Service: Affirmation of Faith]

### [MESSAGE]

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

These are terrible, frightening words from the cross this morning.

Yet, this fourth word sets all the other words from the cross into context.

This word holds the other words together; this word uncovers the scandal of all the words.

Abandonment, loss, words of doubt; not what we’d expect from the Son of God, the Messiah.

We realize that this Fourth Word could **not** have been the First Word – If it had been, I doubt we’d have stayed around for the other six.

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

Somehow, these tortured words are words of hope.

If you think about the darkest times of your own life, when you walked through a valley, you may have cried out some anguished words to God.

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Our darkest valley was not as dark as the one Jesus walked on Good Friday

And, I can't imagine that anything we might have shouted was as accusing or as anguished as:

***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”***

Somehow, to hear these words from the lips of Jesus, to hear him cry out to God this way, is a great...*comfort*.

**Let us pray**...Lord, the pain in your voice brings tears to our eyes. We listen this morning and wonder how we might find hope in this moment. Be with us as we listen to your sorrow and imagine what these profound words truly mean for us.

In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

To hear the hope in this word, I think we need to try to understand it as a prayer.

It has its origin in the lamentation of Psalm 22; in a way, it is a grown-up version of: *“Now I lay me down to sleep...If I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.”*

In this prayer, Jesus is talking about the **location** of his Father.

Up to now, Jesus was so intimate with God the Father that he could say: *“I and the Father are one;” “If you see me, you see the Father.”*

Now at the end, in this moment of anguish, he speaks at some distance from his Father.

*“God, where are you?”* – that is his prayer.

It is a question we all have asked and will ask again; it is a question for which we have no answer; from the cross, Jesus uses this question to help us find hope.

This is usually a question we only ask in the most extreme circumstances.

When we are at the end of our rope, when things fall apart, when it is darkest:

***My God, why have you abandoned me?”***

We use this question when we try to make sense of the senseless; we sometimes use it to help us affix blame.

*“Where was God on September 11<sup>th</sup>? ”*

How could God allow something so terrible to happen; why didn't God stop it?

What does God intend to make from all of this?

How you asked and answered those questions depends largely on where *you* were on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

Maybe you saw the documentary, *“Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero.”*

It was interesting to watch how different people imagined God in such a catastrophic event.

When putting God into the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, most people used the same frame of reference they had for God **before** that day.

For those who thought that God has complete power and would never let anything really bad happen to us, there was disillusionment.

For others who thought of God as a vague, distant, hands-off kind of guy, they had vague, impersonal thoughts offering little consolation.

But, for those who heard words like these from the cross, their thoughts were formed in that framework.

Where was God on the fateful Tuesday in September? – The same place God had been on that Friday afternoon.

Many people said that the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> were the worst that had ever happened in the history of our country, and they may have been right about that.

It was really bad for the country that once thought of itself as the all-powerful, invulnerable, and best-loved by the world to discover that we were not.

But, the worst thing that ever happened in the history of the *world* was not on a Tuesday in Manhattan, it was on a Friday afternoon at Golgotha.

On that day, we saw how complex salvation is and the curious way that this is ***“God With Us.”***

I'm guessing that everyone of us has, at one time or another, asked the question: ***"Why didn't God save his only Son from that horrible death on the cross?"***

I think the answer lies somewhere in understanding that God has a much deeper and more complex notion of power than we do.

God does not use our weapons to achieve victories. God does not share our sentimental definition of *love*.

God the Father, in the Son, is not preserved from life's horrors, but God is present there.

When Jesus prays this prayer, he demonstrated deep faith and honesty.

This man who once declared, *"I and my Father are one,"* is now apart from his Father.

Jesus does not pray for deliverance, he prays for God's presence, *"Father, where are you?"*

The Father is pure holiness and righteousness; God does not bless the events at Golgotha.

The Father's presence there would imply that God is complicit in this horror.

So, the Father sends the Son; the Father, as the Son, wades into the horror; and the Son calls out to the Father from the depths of despair.

The Son speaks to the Father, through the Spirit, by quoting an ancient psalm.

This is the mystery of the Holy Trinity, deeper than we can comprehend.

We can learn a lot from the way Jesus prays.

He taught us to pray in ways that glorify God the Father first.

He prayed that God's will would be done rather than his own will.

We tend to pray, "*God, give me this; God grant me that.*"

*"God deliver me, rescue me, heal me. Save **me**."*

At our very best, we *may* pray that God will help us stop trying to run the world on our terms.



Jesus' words of prayer challenge us.

We may think God is much like we would be if *we* were God: loving, compassionate, considerate, caring.

We would also be all-powerful and omnipotent, but, *if I were God*, then I surely wouldn't allow such terrible suffering, injustice, or tragedy on *my* watch.

As we listen to this intimate conversation within the Holy Trinity, we discover that **God is not like us at all**; there is a huge difference between us and the Father.

The images we conjure of God being like us just don't work when you are face-to-face with God on the Cross.

We think that being God means being able to fix things; to have the freedom to do whatever you please; power to make the world a better place, for our benefit.

Jesus shows us that God is very different from what we expect; God is the suffering servant, willing to be hung on a cross.

God is the One who is willing to send a Beloved Son in order to have us as we are.

We want Jesus to stand up and be God and he just hangs there.

It is why this scene is so difficult for us to watch.

We hold on to an unreasonable image of a God who is like us; we have forgotten that it is us who are supposed to be like God.

When we see God as **we** want God to be, we miss the real truth of the Cross.

The One whom Jesus calls “Father” is not in heaven, sitting on a throne, waiting to swoop down and fix everything.

The Father is there, *with the Son*, hanging on the cross, now in intimate conversation with the Son, therefore, *not as the Son*.

We don't want to listen in on this conversation.

We don't want to hear those terrifying words, "*My God, why have you abandoned me?*" because we don't want to know that that's the kind of God we've got.

Our God does not always work the world to our benefit.

Our God is the type who, when it gets dark, doesn't immediately switch on the lights; rather, God comes and hangs out with us, on the cross, in the dark, and lets us in on the most intimate conversations at the very heart of the Trinity.

The Holy Trinity is a mystery of theology that we humans have never adequately understood or explained.

If the Trinity is truly indivisible, then how could God separate to allow the Son to die on the Cross?

This has been the cause of theological debate since the early church fathers began trying to make sense of who Jesus was and what he did.

But, today is not the day for us to theorize about *how* we are saved by Jesus on the cross.

That is not our purpose as we study the last words of Christ.

Right now, we are simply interested in telling the story of Jesus on the cross.

Today is a day for us to just sit and behold our salvation on the cross.

We are supposed to worship and adore; to gaze upon God's victory, experiencing it rather than trying to understand it.

As we listen to Jesus' prayer, we learn a great deal about this God we did not expect.

This God delivers by not delivering; embraces by forsaking; comes close by being so very different.

This God shows power in complete weakness and unexplainable love.

There was a time when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "*Our Father, who art in heaven...*"

Today, he hangs out in the dark and teaches us a different prayer: *“Our Father, who is here in the dark with us, hallowed be your name.”*

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> This worship series is based on the book, *“Thank God It’s Friday”* by William H. Willimon, © 2006 by Abingdon Press, Nashville