

Sermon for Good Friday  
Friday, April 19, 2019

Text: Psalm 22; John 18:1 – 19:42

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“My God, my God! Why hast thou forsaken me?” *“Eli, Eli! Lema sabachthani?”* Those would be among the last words that Jesus would cry from the Cross. They are the first words of Psalm 22. Borne out of a gut-wrenching anguish, Psalm 22 is the cry of one who knows what it is to be bullied by his enemies, rejected by his community, and abandoned by God. Centuries earlier the psalmist wrote those words. For centuries since, those words were chanted in synagogues and in the Temple. When Jesus cried those words while hanging in despair on the Cross, he wasn’t just asking a simple question of God, he was praying those words of the psalm, and anyone who heard it—any devout Jewish ear—would have understood what he was really saying. Whether the psalmist knew it or not, the verses of Psalm 22 described the fate of one who was to come and declare God’s power. Although we read that Jesus said only the first half of the first verse (up to the asterisk in the Prayer Book Psalter), anyone who heard him would have filled in the remaining 29½ verses and connected everything Jesus had just gone through and was going through right then with those words written centuries before.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And are so far from my cry and from the words of my distress?” The cry of one who felt utterly abandoned by the God who was supposed to be so faithful. Verse 6: “But as for me, I am a worm and no man, scorned by all and despised by the people.” John 18:39-40, “[Pilate asked the crowd], ‘Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?’ The crowd shouted in reply, ‘Not this man, but Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas was a bandit.” And again, John 19:40, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Psalm 22:16, “Packs of dogs close me in and gangs of evildoers circle around me; they pierce my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones.” John 19:16b-18, “So they took Jesus...to what is called The Place of the Skull...There they crucified him.” Psalm 22:17, “They stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them; they cast lots for my clothing.” John 19:23-24, “[When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to

one another, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who would get it.’ This was to fulfill what the scripture says...” And from the Gospel of Matthew, “[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.’” (Matthew 27:41-43a) Psalm 22:7-8 says, “All who see me laugh me to scorn; they curl their lips and wag their heads, saying, ‘He trusted in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, if he delights in him.’”

“My God, my God! Why hast thou forsaken me?” We preachers often stand up in pulpits, like I’m doing right now, preaching about how blessed we are, how loving we should be, how much God loves us, and how much we love our neighbor, but Good Friday forces us to face the darkness in life, the tragedies that we go through, the hardships we face. Good Friday forces us face our own suffering and the suffering of others and break open the wounds of despair and adversity. Good Friday makes us deal with the disappointment and reality of things that are simply beyond our control. We are made to stare it down, confront it, name it, acknowledge it. Because, if we don’t confront our pain and suffering, then we won’t be able to stand up to it and deal with it. Jesus Christ endured the most brutal pain and suffering imaginable through his Passion—his painful journey from the Prætorium of Pontius Pilate through the rocky streets of Jerusalem to the splintered wood of the Cross. And he experienced the lowest point of human existence—that is, death. Nothing further could have been done if he hadn’t done all that. We can’t begin to deal with the pain and suffering in our own lives, unless we first confront it. The psalm reminds us that pain and suffering are inevitable, they are part of the human experience. Good Friday makes us confront it...and stay there.

But Psalm 22 also says in verses 3-4, “Yet you are the Holy One, enthroned on the praises of Israel. Our forefathers put their trust in you; they trusted, and you delivered them.” And in verses 9-10. “Yet you are he who took me out of the womb, and kept me safe upon my mother’s breast. I have been entrusted to you ever since I was born; you were my God when I was still in my mother’s womb.” You see, in the midst of all of the despair and anguish, in the face of all those who encircle and surround, who wish to destroy, the psalmist recalls great moments of deliverance and salvation—those times when God just showed up, time

and time again. The psalmist deals with tragedy by remembering what God has done and by trusting in God's enduring faithfulness.

We often can't explain where our suffering comes from, or why, or why bad things happen to good people, or why disaster strikes, or why people do evil things to other people, but these things do happen. They always have, and they always will. But, Psalm 22 reassures us in verse 27 that God is indeed faithful, that "kingship belongs to the Lord; he rules over the nations." The suffering that we endure today will be met with victory tomorrow. But in the meantime, while that suffering is still part of our present reality, Good Friday reminds us that Christ's passion and death are testimonies of God's presence, even in the midst of deep sorrow. Amen.

#### Resources

Amanda Benckhuysen, "Commentary on Psalm 22," [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2811](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2811)

Judy Fentress-Williams, "Meditation for Good Friday - April 19, 2019," <https://mailchi.mp/6994fa1cdbe0/a-lenten-meditation-for-maundy-thursday-2612465?e=8e999012ea>