

INI - SDG

4th Mid-Week Lenten Service
March 10, 2010
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla, SD

Text: Matthew 27:46 *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

Theme: THE PULPIT OF THE CROSS:
- A Sermon on the Cost of Forgiveness

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus, grace and peace be multiplied to you in His name.

Have you ever considered how the music and words of certain hymns affect our mood? For instance, the words and melody of "Joy to the World" are very fitting for the joyous season which celebrates Christ's birth. But that would not be fitting during the season of Lent. Lenten hymns tend to be somber and reflective. Take for instance the melody of hymn 153, "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted." A somber melody that captures the mood of Lent well. But the words of this hymn, based on Isaiah 53, also cause us to stop and think. Consider verse 3, "*Ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate. Mark the Sacrifice appointed, see who bears the awful load; 'Tis the WORD the LORD's ANOINTED, Son of Man and Son of God.*"

Hard to imagine that we would ever think of sin lightly, but it happens, doesn't it. "We're all sinners," sometimes we say as if to make an excuse. Sometimes we talk of sin as not being "that big of a deal." As if we didn't hurt anyone, so it doesn't matter that much. Or maybe we think of degrees of sin - as if one sin is less offensive to God than another.

In the fourth sermon from the pulpit of the cross we see whether God thinks of sin lightly, nor supposes the evil great. In this fourth saying of Jesus from the cross we hear a sermon on the cost of forgiveness. We turn to Matthew 27:46 -

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

So far the Word of God.

From noon until three o'clock in the afternoon on Good Friday the sun was darkened. It was not an eclipse of the sun nor was it an overcast day. In a supernatural way, God prevented the sun from giving light to the earth. The darkness of the sun was a picture of the darkness which God the Son was experiencing. At Calvary, from out of the darkness, a loud cry resounds from the middle cross. Words which are almost unbearable to hear. Words which express anguish which no person on earth has ever experienced. A soul suffering the torments of hell while still living on earth.

These were not the words of a man who thought He had been unjustly punished for crimes He didn't commit. These are not words of accusation against God for what He was allowing to take place. These are the words of the sinless Son of God praying for aid when He could find none. God had left Him. God had abandoned Him on the cross. To be separated

from God is hell itself - no mercy, no relief, no answer. It surpasses all understanding for us to consider how Jesus could be true God and yet God forsook Him. This is the mystery of the Gospel. God forsaking God, yet never ceasing to be God.

Though experiencing spiritual anguish unlike anything we can imagine or properly put into words, Jesus does not cease to trust in God. In the Aramaic language Jesus cries out in a loud voice, "*Eli,*" that is, "*My God.*" Though forsaken and abandoned by God, Jesus continues to trust in and cling to God as His God. There is no sin in this prayer of Jesus, only a cry for help from the only One who could help Him.

To His God, Jesus asks, "Why?" "Why have You, My God, forsaken Me?" Why did God forsake His Son on the cross? Why did God abandon Him when He needed Him the most? After all, on multiple occasions God the Father had said of Jesus, "***This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.***" (Mt 3:17; 17:5) Everything the Son had done pleased the Father. Every time the Son prayed to the Father, the Father heard His prayer and answered. We see that when Jesus raised Lazarus, fed the 5,000, and even in the Garden of Gethsemane. Yet here on the cross there is no answer, no relief. Heaven is closed to Jesus. God has turned His back on Jesus and closed His ears to His cries for help. This question of "Why?" rings in our ears.

Jesus knew the Old Testament scriptures better than anyone. He knew very well what would cause God would turn His back to someone. God is clear in Scripture - those who forsake God and His covenant, him God will forsake. But God-forsakenness was always initiated by man. Only after man turned away from God would God abandon him. "***Then,***" God says, "***My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them.***" (Deut 31:17)

Knowing Scripture as He did, Jesus knew also the promises of God to those who are faithful to Him. He would have known Psalm 9, ***And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; For You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.*** (Ps 9:10) God has promised that those who trust in Him and seek Him will not be forsaken by Him.

The question of "Why" then is fitting. Jesus had never turned His back to God. Jesus had always been a faithful Son. He had always obeyed His Father's will. He obeyed Him even when it meant suffering and dying on the cross. He continued to be, "My God" to Jesus.

So this question of "why" echoes in our hearts. We get an answer to our question from elsewhere in Scripture. The prophet Isaiah prophesied that this would happen when he wrote in his 53rd chapter, "***The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.***" (Is 53:6b) The Apostle Paul gives the same answer to this question in 2 Corinthians when he writes, "***(God) made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.***" (2 Cor 5:21a)

"Why" Jesus? Because of me. Though Jesus knew no sin, though He had no personal experience with it Himself, God made Him to be sin. Jesus became every unloving and lustful thought I've ever had. Jesus became every harsh word I've ever spoken. Jesus became every hurtful or selfish act I've ever done. And worst of all, Jesus became an idolater - something that is so beyond His understanding. Every time I put something ahead of God and His Word in my life, I committed spiritual idolatry. God made Him to be my sin.

And not just my sin, your sin, and the sin of the whole world. On the cross, Jesus became every murderer, every rapist, every child molester, every thief, every adulterer, every liar, every cheat, - every sin that has ever been committed (except the sin of the Holy Spirit), Jesus became that sin. God made Him to be sin, though He Himself was without sin.

This is why God forsook Jesus. God looked on the cross and did not see His beloved Son, He saw all of the world's sin. And the Lord has declared, "***The soul who sins shall die.***" (Ez 18:4) And also, "***The wages of sin is death.***" (Rom 6:23) And again, "***Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.***" (Gal 3:10) And again Isaiah writes, "***But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.***" (Is 59:2) The sinless Son of God suffered the anguish of abandonment from God because of our sin.

But this is only part of the answer to Jesus question of "Why?" It was because of us that Jesus was forsaken of God, but it was also FOR US. If Jesus had not been forsaken by God, there would still be punishment waiting for us. We would still need to pay the wages of sin, by being eternally separated from God in hell. No mere man could ever make a sacrifice that would remove sin forever. The redemption of the soul is costly. (Ps 49:8) Only the beloved Son forsaken by God could free our souls from hell.

This was the cost of our forgiveness. Jesus was forsaken by God, that we might never be forsaken. He was punished for our sins, so that we might be freed from them forever. Only the innocent sufferings and death of the Son of God could accomplish this. Only Jesus could purchase our forgiveness. God "***made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.***" (2 Cor 5:21) The Righteous One became sin and the sinner became the righteousness of God in Him. Because God looked on cross and saw our sin, He now looks on us and sees His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased!

This sermon from the pulpit of the cross is both gut wrenching and joyous. We hear the groaning of our beloved Jesus from the cross and want to help Him, yet we know He must do this. More than that, if you can handle it, Jesus wanted to do this because it was His Father's will. In fact, the Father loved His Son because He did this. Jesus said, "***My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.***" (Jn 10:17) He wanted to lay down His life as a ransom for us all.

These words of Jesus preach to us the cost of forgiveness. Hearing His words, how could we ever begin to think of sin but lightly, nor suppose the evil great. Here we see its nature rightly, here its guilt we estimate. See the Sacrifice appointed, Jesus bears the awful load; 'tis the WORD, the LORD's ANOINTED, Son of Man and Son of God.

Here we have a firm foundation, Here the refuge of the lost; Christ's the Rock of our salvation, His the name of which we boast. Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt! None shall ever be confounded who on Him their hope have built. Praise be to God and to the Lamb. Amen!