

Matthew 27:46 – Good Friday – April 19, 2019  
 Service of Seven Words from the Cross  
 “My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”  
 New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church – Shoreview, MN  
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***My God, my God, why...?*** It’s an age-old question isn’t it, why? Moses asked it while he was leading the rebellious people of Israel. “*Why have you brought this trouble on your servant?*” (Nu 11:11) he asked the Lord. Jeremiah asked it when his faithful preaching brought him hatred and hostility instead of gratitude and repentance. *Why did you give me this rotten job?* The prophet Habakkuk asked it when he saw the wickedness that the enemies of God seemed to be getting away with. “*Why don’t you do something, Lord?*” The disciples asked it when they met a man who had been born blind. *Why did this happen?* they wanted to know. Martha asked it when Jesus finally arrived at her house four days after her brother had died. “*Why didn’t you come right away?*” she asked.

We ask that question too. Why? Why me? Why do I have all the troubles? Why do I get sick? Why did I lose my job? Why did the Lord take my spouse? Why?

We know why we ask why—because the Lord’s ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We ask why because we have to confess with St. Paul as we look at God’s ways in the world: “***Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!***” (Ro 11:33). That’s why we ask “why?”

But now in our reading this Good Friday, we hear our *Lord Jesus* ask why. “***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?***” Now whether that makes you feel better because Jesus seems more like you in this moment, or worse because Jesus seems more like you in this moment, the important point is the reality of the situation: God the Father had turned away from God the Son. The Father, who had proclaimed his love for his Son several times for all the world to hear,

now hid his face from his Son and showed him none of his Fatherly love.

Instead, the Father let his Son experience only the wrath of his judgment. And so we start to get an inkling of what Jesus was enduring during those three hours of darkness on the cross. He was suffering separation from God. He had been abandoned and forsaken by his heavenly Father - the essence of the punishment of hell. To be separated from God is really the definition of eternal death. Jesus’ words tell us that he was suffering the torments of hell itself during those three hours of darkness.

And how God can be forsaken by God we cannot say. We can only stand in awe of this amazing truth, because our Savior’s question teaches this amazing truth—the Son of God was forsaken by his heavenly Father and the comforting Spirit of God, he asks the question “Why?” all for *you*.

Yes, our Savior’s question reminds us yet again of how deeply he humbled himself for *you*. That, finally, is the answer to the Savior’s question. Why had God abandoned his Son to suffer the torments of hell? The answer is so that we sinners, who richly deserve that torment, might be redeemed and set free from that eternal punishment.

You see, the answer to our Savior’s “Why?” the answer to your “Why” the answer to all of our “Why’s?” is simply this: the grace of God. Yes, the death and torments of Christ were a fearful preaching of the anger of God against sin and sinners, but they were also a wonderful preaching of the grace of God toward sinners.

The traditional closing hymn for our Service of Darkness here at New Life – the 7:00 pm service tonight - is a prayer that is on the lips of all of God’s children: “*Abide with me.*” What greater fear can there be than to be left alone by God, abandoned by him to face life with its troubles and dangers and the inevitable hour of death all alone?

But the answer to Jesus' question is this: God abandoned his own dear Son so that you and I, as children of God by faith in Jesus Christ, will never be abandoned. This is the answer of Scripture. St. Paul writes: ***"He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him"*** (1 Th 5:10). Sure, there will be times when disappointment and trouble hide our eyes from the shining face of God, and yet he will never forget his promise: ***"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"*** (Heb 13:5).

Over all of our troubles and trials is written the Lord's promise: ***"I am with you always, to the very end of the age"*** (Mt 28:20). Because God abandoned his Son and thus appeased his wrath against sin through him, now God can say to his children: ***"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze"*** (Isa 43:1,2). Because God's Son was abandoned for us, we can make Paul's firm conviction our own and say with him: ***"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"*** (Ro 8:38,39). Yes, even in the hour of death we can rejoice with David and say: ***"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me"*** (Ps 23:4). We can face death with the calm assurance that God will not abandon our bodies to the grave, but as he raised up his own Son in glory on the third day, so on the Last Day he will raise our bodies in glory, imperishable, fit to live with him forever in heaven.

***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*** The answer is so that you can confidently pray to your once-forsaken now risen and ascended Savior:

*Hold thou thy cross  
before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom  
and point me to the skies.  
Heav'n's morning breaks,  
and earth's vain shadows flee;  
In life, in death, O Lord,  
abide with me! Amen. (CW 588:7)*

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<sup>i</sup> This sermon is adapted from 2006 Lenten resources published by Northwestern Publishing House.