

Alone in the Dark
Fourth in a Series of Seven, “Words from the Cross”
March 15, 2022

Matthew 27 It was about twelve at noon, when darkness came over the whole country, because the sun had stopped shining, and the darkness lasted until three in the afternoon. About 3 o’clock in the afternoon Jesus called out aloud, “Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani?” which means, “My God, My God! Why did You forsake Me? When some of the men who were standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, He is calling Elijah.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

(Story of girl who can’t sleep / afraid of the dark. Mom tells her to go back to her room and not be afraid / Jesus and His angels are with you. She thinks for a moment and then replies, “How about if I sleep here with Dad and you go in with Jesus and the angels!)

“Alone in the dark” is our theme tonight, as Jesus suffers in the darkness from noon until 3 and then speaks a fourth time from the old rugged cross.

The fourth word is in the middle of the seven words which Jesus spoke on the cross, and it takes us to the heart of his suffering. The account of our Lord’s passion shows us exactly how angry our God is towards our accumulated sin, and secondly, how deep is our Father’s love for us.

Tonight I invite you to come one more time to the foot of the cross with all of your weariness, your anxiety, and your loneliness. Come with your failures, your faults, and every bit of your frailty. Come with your questions, your opinions, and your passions. Specifically tonight, come with every bit of darkness which is haunting you or holding you back and making you feel alone.

It’s Friday afternoon, and it’s dark everywhere. At Jesus’ birth, the night on Bethlehem’s field turned bright as day, but at death, just the opposite happened. The middle of the day turned dark as night. This darkness, from 12 to 3 in the afternoon, was not an eclipse. In an eclipse the sun is up there, the earth is down here, and the moon comes between the two. Then the side of the moon that faces the earth is dark.

When Jesus died, there was a full moon, it was in the days of the Passover. The sun, which is 93 million miles away and one and a third million times as large as

the earth stopped shining. It was as though God wrapped a blanket of darkness around the earth as he did in the Egyptian plague. No doubt frightened folks all over the world stopped eating, drinking, and being merry. Laborers stopped working, children ceased playing, travelers couldn't see where they were going, and without exception, routines were interrupted. Heaven and nature were terrified at what was being done to the very Son of God.

Jesus was alone in the dark. In Gethsemane, Jesus had called on the angels to be with him, and they were. He wanted the company of his disciples, but they kept falling asleep. Judas sold him out, Peter followed at a distance, and all the other disciples ran away. Jesus was alone with the soldiers when they tied his hands, alone before Annas, alone before Caiphas, alone before Herod, and alone before Pilate. His own people cried out for his crucifixion, his religious leaders wanted him dead, but the worst slap in the face of all was that His Father abandoned Him when He needed his presence the most. In righteous anger, Yahweh turned His face away. It was Jesus, left alone in the dark to do battle with the forces of darkness.

Sin, by definition, separates us from God. Every time we sin, whether it be in our thoughts, words, deeds, or habits, we are missing the mark. We are turning our backs on the very God who created us in the first place and redeemed us in the second place. In every one of our days, our inclination is to wander away from his grace. It is to stumble into the grip of the enemies of our God. Again and again we are tempted to become like sheep without a shepherd leaving the green pastures and sauntering into patches of thistles and worse.

Jesus, on the other hand, was tempted in every way that we are, yet without stain. He lived the perfect life that none of us could ever get close to living. Even though He is the holy, the innocent, the spotless, the pure and the righteous one, in those hours of darkness, God's face was hidden. The Son was on His own. Most of the time in his days of arrest and trial, he was that lamb who opened not His mouth. But in the darkness He opens it this one time and cries out "why?" In that cry there is misery, and there is mystery. Life couldn't get any worse than this.

As you spend time at the foot of the cross, tonight I invite you to reflect on those times in your life when you felt alone. Times when your days were miserable and full of unanswered questions. Perhaps it was a time when your marriage or the marriage of a loved one was fading towards failure. Perhaps it was when a young person in your life died without warning, perhaps it was when a friend took his own life or a parent suffered from cancer or a grandparent declined rapidly into

dementia. In the quiet of this night, think back on those seasons of life when you found yourself asking, “Why can’t I see the light at the end of the tunnel?”

A better question, of course, is “Who is the light at the end of the tunnel? Scripture answers clearly that Jesus Christ is there, He is here, and He is everywhere. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In all the circumstances of our lives, He is sitting at the right hand of His father, he is ruling all of heaven and earth for the benefit of his church. He is the light of the world, in Him there is no darkness.

The Good news is as good as it has ever been these days. Even when and especially when we feel alone in the dark, we are not. Christ would hold us close and invite us to live by faith instead of by sight. To believe that God will never permit us to be tested or tempted beyond what we are able to endure, but that He will provide a way of escape, a way through.

To live by faith is to know that because He was forsaken, we will never be alone in the dark. Because he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, we are able to find our way through our cloudy and rainy days. Because he was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities, we experience a peace that helps us survive the fiercest of storms.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers full of folks who deal with all kinds of darkness, but as often as they remember what they have learned from their mother’s knees, they are still and they know that God is God. They are regularly tempted to shake their puny little fists at Almighty God wondering why he allows such chaos, but as often as they stay focused on the promises of God, they calm down.. Tonight as they hear a Son crying out to His Father, they remember that they are the dear children who may approach their dear father in heaven any time they so choose.

Week after week, they huddle together in the sanctuary of their God, where the Word of God is a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their paths. Day after day, they wake up, not so much hunkering down in fear, but stepping forward in confidence tempered by humility. Night after night, they lay their heads down on their pillows in peace, trusting that God is awake, trusting that He will answer every one of their prayers in the way that is best for them, trusting that there are divine purposes in every one of their heartaches, trusting that He is with them, He is for them, He is alongside them, He is in front of them leading the way, and He is in back of them, helping to pick up the pieces. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.