

Fellow redeemed, Jesus was forsaken by God, so that you and I would never be. Never. Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are not forsaken by God. He has not turned his back on us. 2000 years ago he withdrew his love from his Son, so that his love would rest on us, his sons and daughters, today. We may never understand the reasons for God's actions, We may scratch our heads and wonder over and again why. But we can always trust God's heart. God has a good heart, a heart full of love for us in Christ, a love that is revealed to us on the cross.

When Katie Luther, Martin Luther's wife, entered his study that day so many years ago and asked him what he was doing, her bewildered husband, still staring at the wall, replied, "Forsaken by God! Forsaken by God! Who can understand it?" No one, really, but we believe it, don't we? And believing, we celebrate and sing:

*How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure:
That he should give his only Son
To make a wretch his treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss,
The Father turns his face away
And wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory. Amen.*

Matthew 27:45, 46 – *Undefeated by the Cross* – 125,106
04/01/20 – Pastor David M. Kuehl – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI

A seasoned pastor and his wife of many years had an understanding. When he was working on a sermon, he was not to be disturbed. Even if hours went by and he missed a meal, he was to be left alone. Only under the most unusual set of circumstances was he to be bothered.

One day he got up and went straight to his study. Breakfast came and went, but he didn't emerge. This didn't bother his wife, for this wasn't the first time he'd missed a meal. But when the noon hour arrived and he didn't come to dinner, she began to worry about him. She went to his study and peeked inside. He was there, staring at the wall, deep in thought. She quietly closed the door.

More hours passed. Supper time came and went, and her husband still hadn't emerged from his study. Now her concern morphed into irritation that he didn't have the common courtesy to excuse himself from any of the three meals that she had prepared for him that day. She went to his study, threw open the door, and exclaimed, "What are you doing in here, Martin? What's so important that you haven't come out all day?"

What was so important? What was so profound that Dr. Martin Luther spent the entire day thinking about it? My friends, it was these words of Jesus from our text: **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** As we meditate on these words of Jesus today, let's rejoice that we are **Undefeated by the Cross**. Let's join Luther and:

Contemplate Christ's Cry from the Cross

- 1. A cry that causes us to cringe**
- 2. A cry that causes us to celebrate**

1. Simply put, on the cross Jesus was forsaken by God. God the Father abandoned his Son in his greatest hour of need. Not one drop of compassion, not one iota of goodness, not even the tiniest token of mercy was there to sustain God's one and only Son.

Do you remember how at Jesus' baptism and at his transfiguration God the Father had expressed how much he loved his Son and how pleased he was with his life? But not here. Not now. Here and now what God basically was saying is this: "This is not my son. I have no love for him. With him I am utterly disgusted."

So complete was God's abandonment of his Son that, even as Jesus cried out to him from the cross, he didn't use terms of endearment, like *Abba* or *Father*, as he had so often done in the past. No, he used the somewhat harsh-sounding word *Eli*, that is, *God*. As a twelve-year-old in the temple, Jesus had said to his mother, "*Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?*" (Lk 2:49). As he poured out his soul in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed, "*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me*" (Mt 26:39). Even as he began and ended his words from the cross, Jesus said, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*" (Lk 23:34), and "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*" (Lk 23:46).

But not here and not now. Here and now Jesus cried out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" Jesus was facing the full fury and bearing the painful impact of God's anger over sin--your sin and my sin. He was suffering the fate of the damned of hell. Forsaken by God and abandoned by him, he was cut off from his tender love and compassion. As Isaiah had prophesied, "*We considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted*" (53:4). That's what damnation is. That's what hell is--stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God forever. Damnation is what we deserve, and hell is where we deserve to go.

But because Jesus was serving as our divine substitute, because, as the Apostle Paul says, "*God made him to be our sin*" (2 Cor 5:21), damnation is what he suffered, and hell is where he had to go. Jesus had to suffer damnation in hell for us. How his cry from the cross, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" makes us cringe with sorrow and leads us to confess with shame:

*Behold the Man upon a cross,
My sin upon his shoulders;
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has bro't me life.
I know that it is finished.*

"*I know that it is finished.*" What beautiful words these are! Because Jesus was willing to be abandoned by God--forsaken by him to hell, we can also respond to his cry from the cross with celebration. For in his words, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" we find the heart and soul of our salvation. We discover that we are **undefeated by the cross**.

2. Think for a moment of who it was who cried out from the cross. It was Jesus, the one who came to seek and to save what was lost. It was the Messiah, the long-promised and long-awaited Anointed One of God. Of all the people God could have forsaken, why Jesus? Why his one and only Son? Why the one whom he loved dearly and with whom he was greatly pleased? Why did God forsake the only one who could honestly and innocently ask, "*Why have you forsaken me?*"

God did this so that he could save us, who have no reason or right to ask, "Why have you forsaken me?" We're the ones who run away from God, who fail to trust his words and promises in times of crisis, who find all kinds of excuses to put other things first in our hearts and lives. We're the ones who've forsaken God by daring to put what we want before what he wants. Do you think that maybe, just maybe, this is one of the lessons God wants us to learn during this COVID-19 pandemic? That our priorities have been way out of whack, that we've taken way too much for granted, that we've failed to appreciate the things of God that are really and truly important?

God's answer to Jesus' question, the answer that Jesus understood even as he asked it, is this: "I have abandoned you for the sake of every single human being from Adam and Eve to the end of the world." You see, in his body Jesus bore the penalty for every sin that has ever been committed or that ever will be committed. When Jesus died, God looked down from heaven and saw every one of those sins, and for every one of them his burning anger was hurled down at Jesus like a divine thunder bolt that penetrated every fiber of his being. This was no mere token payment for sin. On the cross the full payment for every sin--your sin and my sin--was extracted from Jesus. How his cry from the cross, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" leads us to celebrate, for in Jesus' death on the cross God punished our sin in full! We are **undefeated by the cross**.

The cross. Can we turn in any direction without seeing one? Whether it's perched atop the old church, etched into numerous gravestones in our cemetery, or hanging right here on the wall of our chancel, the cross is the expression of our faith, isn't it? Why? Look no further than the design itself. It couldn't be simpler. One beam horizontal; the other vertical. One reaches out--like God's love; the other reaches up--like God's holiness. One represents the width of his love; the other reflects the height of his holiness. The cross is where the two intersect. It's where God's burning anger over our sin and his incredible love for us meet. They meet in Jesus. There and in him we find that we are **undefeated by the cross**.