

Lindenwood Christian Church
Good Friday 2023
Mark 15:33-34

“When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabacthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”

It was three o’clock in the afternoon and Good Friday. I was twelve-years-old and was playing outside on a lovely spring day. I noticed on my watch that it was 2:50. Giving no reason, I left my friends, went home and ran to my bedroom. Closing the door, I knelt down beside my bed, and got a card with a portrayal of Jesus hanging in agony on the cross. I found myself turning over, again and again, his final words, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

I couldn’t figure it out. I still can’t.

In the abyss of his darkness, Jesus questions the silence of his heavenly Father. On the threshold of defeat, Jesus wonders why his Father isn’t helping him...isn’t with him.

Sisters and brothers: Nowhere else in the four Gospels does Jesus ever call his Father “God.” Taking his last mortal breath, the Word-made-flesh collapses into a cry for a missing God (1).

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Good Friday 2023. We gather this year still reeling from the year’s start when Tyre Nichols was killed by five police officers. It made national—in fact, international—news for several days. Three years ago we faced a pandemic of COVID. *This* year, now, we face that our city is barraged with a pandemic of violence and killing. So is our nation.

I have faced that killing personally. Last Saturday I presided at the funeral of a second cousin, murdered as he was walking to his car to pick up his daughter from work. Seven months earlier, *his* brother had likewise been shot and murdered.

Indeed, it is a pandemic of violence and killing.

Do we grieve because we sense God has abandoned *us*? Rather, could it be otherwise: *This* Good Friday is Jesus grieving because *we* have abandoned *him*?

Many of us heard this Passion story on Palm Sunday, as Jesus was being arrested at Gethsemane, and one of his disciples, with his sword, sliced off the ear of the slave of the High Priest: **“All who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?”** (Matthew 26:52) Yes, our Savior lived his life and ministry never turning to the sword, and he died nonviolently. Martyred in our city fifty-five years ago this week, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., took Jesus on his word, and died similarly.

This Good Friday: with guns aplenty in our midst, Jesus’ cry still challenges us.

- (1) See Raymond E. Brown, S.S., A Crucified Christ in Holy Week: Essays on the Four Gospel Passion Narratives (Collegeville, Minnesota: 1986), pp. 43-44. See also his book, The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave, volume 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 1044-51.

