**Good Friday Reflection**

**Fourth Word: My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?**

**Mark 15:33-34 NRSVUE**

**The Death of Jesus**

**33**When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. **34**At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means,

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

**Prayer:**

**Meet us, loving God, at the place of the skull,**

**when we had hoped for a peaceful garden.**

**Meet us in our defeats,**

**when we had hoped for victory.**

**Meet us in our temptation,**

**when we had hoped for clear and easy decisions.**

**Meet us here, O God, in this healing moment,**

**for we need you now.**

**Amen.**

This prayer we just prayed together speaks to the reality of our inner turmoil we experience when our hopes and dreams don’t line up with our current reality. When our sufferings become unbearable, when we witness the unthinkable sufferings of others, we too may question, where are you God?

Jesus’ mournful prayer from the cross, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* was not the first time these words were spoken in scripture. David spoke these very same words when he was in a grave situation, surrounded by the enemy, wondering why God has not heard his previous cries for help as documented in Psalm 22. He speaks of being poured out like water, his bones being out of joint, his heart melting like wax, and being so parched his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth. David eventually was delivered from that dire situation, but even before that deliverance occurred, he had an inner transformation from that feeling of being abandoned by God, to trust in God; that God would provide what was needed even in the valley of the shadow of death and that his soul would be restored; God would be there to provide for his needs and would guide him through it and that he would dwell with God forever. In that trust, it gave David both an inner peace and the strength and courage to carry on.

Though Jesus was not delivered from death on the cross, just like we know death does not get the final answer because God raised him from death into glory, the feeling of abandonment didn’t get the final answer either, before his earthly life ended. How do we know that? We know that because of the words he cried out before breathing his last breath, *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”* In that surrendering, Jesus was at peace. Peace, not fear and abandonment got the final answer. God answered that prayer, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”*, by placing within Jesus the sense of the divine presence still with him in his suffering and pain.

These words, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”,* are important words for us to hear, because they give us permission to question. The feeling of abandonment is natural feeling when we don’t understand suffering especially when we have tried to live faithfully, when our prayers aren’t being answered with the outcome we have asked for. When this happens we can sometimes question the existence of God or feel like God has abandoned us. We can’t help but wonder, “Where is God in all of this? Friends, let me tell you, God can handle the questioning. But I also want you to know, these scriptures also affirm, God does not want us to stay stuck in the questioning; in the feeling of abandonment. God will lead us back to a place of trust if we open our lives to the nudges God gives to us, even when we don’t initially recognize the divine presence in those nudges.

Several years ago, I had a friend who was battling bone cancer and I don’t hesitate to share his story because when he posted his testimony on Facebook, I asked him if I could use that testimony in my preaching, and he gave me his blessing to share his story as he wanted as many people to hear it as possible. You may think that this is going to be a story of how prayers were answered and he survived, but that is not what happened.

He had a stem cell transplant which worked for a short while and all were rejoicing on how God answers prayer. But it wasn’t long before cancer reared its ugly head again. Prayers from numerous prayer chains were being offered for his healing as his health continued to deteriorate. He was doing his best to walk with God daily but began not to doubt the existence of God, but whether or not he truly was walking with God, had he strayed from God’s path.

In that questioning, God answered my friend in no uncertain terms. While walking up and down his driveway in an attempt to be strong enough to walk in the Relay for Life around the track at Senior, his step-daughter took 2 pictures of him walking with one picture being taken in portrait style and the other being taken in the landscape format. In the first picture you could see my friend’s body walking down the driveway. In the second picture where his body should have been in the photograph, there was only a bright cocoon of light with the rest of the picture showing the scenery around him as in the first picture. They took the picture to people who specialize in photography to find out if there might be some explanation for why his body didn’t show up in the second photo, but there was no earthly explanation. So, in his post, my friend shared those pictures and told all of his doubts and now of his reassurance and peace. He wanted all of his friends to know that no matter the earthly outcome of his cancer battle, that he was fine and would continue to be fine because he knew he was in the hands of God and would dwell with God forever. He ended his post by saying some of you will come to believe, some of you will have your faith strengthened, and some of you won’t believe and that is okay. Just know that I am going to be fine no matter what and I am at peace.

My friend did not survive the battle with cancer in his earthly journey, but he did overcome the doubt and questioning and lived the rest of his life in a peace that goes beyond all earthly understanding as he commended his spirit into the arms of God knowing that God was dwelling with him now and that he would dwell in the house of the Lord for all eternity. He had not been abandoned nor had he strayed beyond the reach of God.

Thank you, loving God, that you meet us in the peaceful gardens of life and in the valleys of the shadows of suffering and death. Thank you that you meet us in our victories and are there to help us in our defeats. Thank you that you meet us not only in the clear easy decisions, but for how you meet us and give us the strength and courage to navigate the challenges life puts in our path. When we feel abandoned God, help us like you did with David, Jesus and Dan to a place of trust once again, granting us peace and whatever else we need for each moment. Meet us here, O God, in this healing moment, for we need you now and every day. Amen.