

4th Sunday of Lent – The Fourth Last Word of Jesus from the Cross – “My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?” – March 21/22, 2020

Every breath was a sheer agony, now. He could draw air in, but to exhale, He had to push Himself up on the spike that held His feet fast to the cross. He could hold Himself up like that for but a few moments before the pain and cramping overpowered and He would slump down again, only to feel more torture in His hands as He hung from their spikes.

Hands. How strange now that His own hands were in such pain that his mind should remember other hands from long ago. They were the hands of the carpenter, the man He called Pa. He saw those hands now in his mind's eye: huge hands (at least to the eyes of a little boy); rough hands from years of working with wood; but gentle hands too ... hands that held Him ... hands that taught Him to hammer and saw and plane and level ... hands that would take a little boy's tiny hand in his own great hand and lead Him to synagogue; hands that were the first to open the scroll of the scripture and place the little one's tiny fingers on the parchment to run them over the sacred words, feel the holy touch of God. Joseph's hands came to Him now, and as they had when He was a young boy, those hands led Him to Abba, God, to the prayers of His people, to the psalms of David the King, David, the carpenter's ancestor. From the time He could speak, He had learned those beautiful songs and prayers at the hands of His Mother and foster

father. Every night before He'd sleep, He'd recite one or two of them until He gradually came to know and love them all: "You are my inheritance, O Lord;" "I love you Lord, my strength;" "Your words, Lord, are Spirit and truth;" "The Lord is my shepherd, nothing indeed shall I want;" "I believe I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living;" "I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me;" "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord;" "As the deer longs for running streams, so I long for you, my God;" "My soul thirsts for you, Lord;" "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord God of hosts;" "Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord;" "Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me, you answered me."

As when He was little, so now, when He was so helpless, Joseph's hands led Him to temple; led Him to prayer; led Him to the house of the Father, Abba.

And then, He could feel those hands no more. He could see nothing but the ever-darkening sky. He could hear only the rasping of His own shallow breaths. He felt nothing, nothing but pain and a terrible, terrible loneliness. Nothing. And then, His mind filled ... filled with one of those prayers He remembered, one that spoke the isolation and abandonment He felt at that darkest moment. He had to give voice to it. He had to say His prayer before sleep took Him. He pushed Himself up and fairly shouted into the gathering gloom that prayer, that horribly perfect prayer: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" All His emotions He poured into those words. Every ounce of strength and breath He had left went into the cry of that prayer. Those first words of the twenty-second Psalm of David were all He could speak before He slumped down again, gasping for breath. The rest of it, He would finish in the crushing silence He felt from heaven and from Abba

... "All who see me laugh at me ... they pierce me through ... You trusted in God; let God deliver you ... if God loves you ... All is taken, all is lost ... come near, my help ... I trusted in God, may God deliver me ... I long to stand in the midst of your people and sing your name ... Cry out your praises and hold fast, hold fast to YOU, my Lord."

The prayer was ended. In this darkest moment of His life, in this time of abandonment, He would do as He had always done. He would walk to church. He would say His prayers. He would, though he could feel nothing but the spike, take the hand of his Father, Abba, and abandon Himself to the will of God.

"Turn your ear to me, O Lord, answer when I call!"

Amen.