

Faith In Practice

Life Changing Medical Mission

Fear and Anguish



This is the first in our series of Weekly Devotionals. [Subscribe here](#) to receive them every Friday.

Psalm 22 Lectionary Response:

*My God, my God, why have you
forsaken me?*

*They stare and gloat over me;
they divide my clothes among themselves,*

*All who see me mock at me; they make
mouths at me; they shake their heads;
“Commit your cause to the Lord; let him
deliver— let him rescue the one in whom
he delights!”*

***My God, my God, why have you
forsaken me?***

*For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;*

*I can count all my bones.
**My God, my God, why have you
forsaken me?***

*and for my clothing they cast lots.
But you, O Lord, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
**My God, my God, why have you
forsaken me?***

*I will tell of your name to my brothers and
sisters; in the midst of the congregation I
will praise you: You who fear the Lord,
praise him! All you offspring of Jacob,
glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you
offspring of Israel!
**My God, my God, why have you
forsaken me?***

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Giving cadence rhythmically to each stanza of the Psalm, the words lull, build. Again, again. My God, My God....

They are bolded, these words, so we know that it is we who are to speak them. These ancient words of anguish, despair, confusion. The Psalmist’s wail, Jesus’ cry. These words which then become our own when we say, ‘My God, My God....’

I did not choose this psalm because of the current crisis. I chose this psalm because the bolded refrain rose off the page for me in a new way as I read the missal litany for Palm Sunday. For Psalm 22 is always the psalm for Palm Sunday. Right there in the middle of the waving palms, the children wandering down the aisles as their parents gently herd them toward the chancel, is Jesus’ anguished cry. Jesus’ cry spoken aloud just as his triumphant entry into Jerusalem is read each year on Palm Sunday.

It strikes me, especially now, that Jesus’ cry seems to get drowned out by the singing and the sound of trumpets each year. But not this year. Instead, his words lift off the page in stark and bolded black. For how can we wave palms and joyously sing, ‘Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord’? How can we rejoice knowing there are so many suffering, dying alone and afraid? When so many do not know when their next paycheck will come? When their lives, our lives, seem like they will never be the same again? When we know so many more

shall die because of the virus or because of the economic implications that shall follow?

But, as I read the lectionary, I have to ask myself, how is it that we can we *ever* rejoice on Palm Sunday, when we hear his cry of anguish among the Hosannas, when we know that his cry is the portent of what is to come? When we know that in the days ahead, we will journey beside him as he is betrayed, as we watch him fall to his knees in Gethsemane. As he shudders under the blows and stumbles beneath the cross as those who sang 'Hosanna' scream 'Crucify'? When he suffers all of this only to die in torment and despair. Alone. Abandoned. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? With all this before us, how can we rejoice?

But he tells us, shows us, we can. We can rejoice.

We can, because just as we speak his words of anguish on Palm Sunday, as they become our own, he is telling us, and we can be assured by the certain truth that, he is there beside us. Even in our anguish, when hope is lost, when we feel abandoned. When dying and alone, we can trust that he is there. Never does he deny the anguish or pain. He holds the pain and anguish in his nail-scarred hands. He holds it, and he holds us, in our pain and fear. So, we can rejoice. So, we can wave palms and sing with trumpet. Not because all is well, but because he is with us. We have heard his cry. And in his cry, we have heard our own.

So, let us on this Palm Sunday cry out these ancient words of anguish, despair, confusion. The Psalmist's wail, Jesus' cry. These words which have become our own. My God, My God....

And let us also rejoice, for in our anguish we know that he is sharing in our grief, confusion and fear. May we, as we journey beside him to the cross in this Holy Week, see his pain in a new way. Let us remember that in every step he takes in the days ahead, he is showing us that he knows what it is to grieve, to fear. He is telling us that he knows what it is to feel abandoned by God when we too at times feel abandoned by God, as we descend into moments of despair. He is telling us that this despair is real. It is real. But it is not the final word. For he is with us, every step of the way.

So, in these days before us, as we share his pain in a new way, as we see that in his pain he is sharing ours, may we follow him to Easter's dawning. Easter's dawning through him and in us. Easter's dawning filled with Hosannas' rejoicing. But let us also remember that Easter's dawning is not a day. It is not Easter Sunday. Easter's dawning happens every time we feel his hope in a moment of hopelessness. His love in a moment when we feel abandoned. When we know he is beside us suddenly in moments when we have felt lost and alone. True Easter's dawning that he holds out to us every single day of the year. In his nail-scarred hands.

Praying for each of you, and may you, in your fear and anguish during these uncertain days, feel him beside you. Sharing your pain as he shares with you his, especially during this Holy Week. His pain which is born of, and overflowing with, his love. His love that cannot ever separate us from him or from each other. Ever. Come what may.

Blessings,
Rev. Linda L. McCarty
President & CEO

These words have been inspired by our beloved people of Guatemala. They who know how to rejoice even in pain, for they know, for they live into the truth, that he is there beside them. In their tears. In their rejoicing. I am forever grateful to them for showing me the way. For witnessing to me what walking humbly with our God looks like.

Please pray for them. Please pray for them. Even as I know they are praying for us.

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