

McCabe United Methodist Church
Final Words (Part 4): “My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”
Psalm 22:1-5 * Mark 15:29-36
March 16 & 17, 2013
Pastor Rick Fossum

Today, we continue with our series we're calling '*Final Words*' or '*Final Statements*'. It's a series where we imagine ourselves standing at the foot of the cross some 2,000 years ago and listening to the final words or statements Jesus spoke. Today, we listen as Jesus calls out to God in agony.

According to the gospel of Mark, Jesus hung from the cross for six, long painful hours from 9:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon when the Bible tells us that Jesus breathed his last.

Sometime during those six hours a crowd of people gathered around the cross. They were every day, ordinary people. People like a lot of us. Some Bibles call them bystanders, other Bibles call them passerbys. But, they were just ordinary people watching a crucifixion.

Finally, during the sixth hour, about 3:00 in the afternoon, again according to Mark, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “**Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?**” Which means, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**”

“I was one of the crowd. I was curious. I'd never been to a crucifixion before and when I heard about this one, I decided to have a look. If you've never seen someone nailed to a cross before, it's a gruesome way to die. The victim's hands and feet are nailed to a cross. They're stripped of their clothes and slowly they die as it becomes harder and harder for them to breathe.

“Some of the people were standing and some were sitting, but we were all watching as the three men hung from their crosses. At first, I didn't know why, but the crowd was most interested in the man hanging from the middle cross. I heard people calling his name. He was Jesus. The Roman soldiers had nailed a crude sign to the top of Jesus' cross. It said, “*The King of the Jews.*”

“I watched as the people were yelling insults at Jesus and calling him all kinds of horrible names. I looked at him. I could tell that he had been flogged and beaten before he was crucified. I didn't know what crime he had committed. I just figured it must have something pretty bad. I stood there for a while.

“I recognized some of the people who had gathered around his cross. I saw

merchants standing there and teachers and nurses and police officers, and even some religious people from the temple. They were all yelling at Jesus. **'Man'**, I thought to myself. **'The poor guy doesn't have any friends'**.

"At first, I felt compassion for him. I mean, after all, he was dying on a cross. It couldn't get much worse. The insults were a bit of an overkill I thought.

But then, a strange thing happened to me. As I listened to all the yelling and screaming, the insults and name-calling, something happened to me and I became one of them. I started yelling at Jesus and calling him names. I don't know why. I guess I wanted to be a part of the crowd or something. I wanted to fit in and so I joined in.

"Hey, how's the weather up there', I yelled at Jesus? **'Who do you think you are anyway? You're not the King of the Jews. You're not anybody's king'**. And then I laughed at him.

"I yelled some more and the more I yelled, the madder I got at Jesus. I found myself hating him. **'Some Jew you are'**, I screamed. **'You're a nobody. A nobody'!** And then, I spit on him.

"I don't know why I did that either. He hadn't done anything to me. But somehow, someway, after hearing everyone else insulting him and calling him names, I became one of them. I discovered that day that I had a capacity to hate an innocent man. A man I didn't even know.

"Then, I saw Jesus raise his head. You could tell it was difficult for him. He raised his head and he looked up to the heavens and he said these words and I'll never forget them: **'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me'?**" And then, he breathed his last.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me'? Do you know what? I believe that Jesus was talking not only to God that day. He was also talking to the rest of us. We had also forsaken Jesus. We had turned our backs on him. We had forsaken him by our words and actions.

It would be easy for us to judge all those people who were yelling at Jesus and calling him names. They must have been bad people, right? Mean people. Horrible people.

Yet, if we take a close look at them. If we look into their faces and if we're honest, we'd realize that they were good people. They were citizens of Jerusalem.

They were taxpayers. They were religious leaders, business leaders, moms and dads, maybe even some kids.

Something happens to people when we dislike someone or fear someone or resent someone. We might not even know this someone, but we have the capacity to do mean, nasty and hateful things to them.

I remember watching a movie on TV. It was a western. It was your typical western. There was shooting and robbing, fighting and a bit of romance. It was pretty good. Toward the end, one of the bad guys in the movie was hanged. The interesting part was this: a crowd of people showed up to watch the hanging. They were in a festive mood with picnic lunches and everything.

What's the matter with people? Isn't it enough to have a crucifixion? Do they need to scream and shout even at people who are hurting?

Of course, we'd never do anything like that, would we? I mean, we'd never add insult to injury by hurting someone who is already hurting. Or, would we?

I remember when I was a kid. One of my friends played a trick on a girl who was riding on his school bus. You might know the girl. Every class has at least one like her and maybe more. She was shy and plain looking. She didn't fit in with hardly anyone. My friend pretended to like her that morning and he offered her a piece of candy. She took it and ate it. But, instead of candy, it was E-lax. We thought it was the funniest thing ever. And we giggled every time we saw her that day. Why would my friend do something like that? Worse, why did we laugh? Why did we think it was funny?

Maybe you remember the boy or girl who was picked on in your school. Maybe, that boy or girl was you. We all have this tendency inside of us to do good and great and kind things. But, we're also capable of doing things not so good or so kind. There's a spot of darkness in all of us and it's called sin.

We learn a lot at a young age. We learn many of the good parts of life. We learn to be honest. We learn about respect. We learn about faith. We learn about loyalty. We learn about the value of hard work and never giving up. These are all good things to learn.

But, we also learn the not-so-good parts of life at a young age. We learn that we can make ourselves look better by making others look worse. We learn that it's better to be a part of a crowd than to stand alone. We learn that it's better for us if we have someone else to blame for our mistakes and failures.

I remember another time when I was in basic training. Whenever someone from our platoon did something to get the rest of us in trouble with our drill sergeants and we had to run an extra mile because of it, or get up an hour early or miss out on a meal, there was a self-appointed group of vigilantes in our barracks (appointed by the drill sergeants) who would impose their form of punishment on the offending soldier. Usually, the vigilantes would get up sometime during the night, throw a blanket over the offenders face and beat him. They even had a name for it. It was called a '*blanket party*'. And the rest us? We saw and heard everything, but we didn't do anything. We might have even laughed.

There's a dark side to our human nature. Do you remember the Germans and how they murdered millions of Jews? Do you remember the Soviets and how they murdered millions of their own people? Do you remember the Khmer Rouge and how they murdered millions of fellow Cambodians? Do you remember My Lai and the American soldiers who murdered over 200 men, women and children. It happens. It happens too much. There is a spot of darkness in all of us.

Whom do you dislike? Republicans? Democrats? Illegal immigrants? People on welfare? Unemployed people? Homeless people? Rich people? Gay people? Straight people? The guy next door? It doesn't take much harm someone else if we dislike that person or if we think they're a threat to us or if we resent them or fear them in some way. Do you see our dark side?

Or, what makes us explode with anger and say hurtful things to other people including people we love? What makes us dislike another person enough to want to hurt him or her? What makes us think we're so much better than others that we can judge them and make fun of them? What makes us turn our backs on certain people and wish they'd go away?

I wonder if that's not the purpose of today's scripture reading. Do you suppose we're meant to find ourselves somewhere in that crowd of people who stood around the cross 2,000 years ago? Do you suppose we're meant to see ourselves yelling insults at Jesus because everyone else was doing it? Do you suppose we're meant to see our own dark sides? Do you suppose we're meant to cry out like Jesus did that day and say, "**My God, my God, I'm sorry that I've forsaken you and your Son?**"

Let's pray: *"Forgive us, Lord, for the insults we've shouted, for the names we've called people, for turning our backs on the least and lost. Help us to stand with you and with all your people wherever and whoever they may be. Amen."*