**Good Friday**

**April 2, 2021**

**Text—Psalm 22**

When we began this sermon series on the Psalms way back in Advent, I made the claim that Jesus Christ can be seen in every single psalm. Although he didn’t write any of them, they all ultimately point to him and to the great works of salvation that he accomplished for his people. And of all the Psalms, I don’t think there’s one in which Christ can be seen more clearly than in our psalm for this evening, Psalm 22. Of course, the particular event of Jesus’ life that is reflected in this psalm is his crucifixion. The psalmist writes in verse 16, “For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and my feet.” Well, what else does that refer to other than Jesus’ hands and feet being nailed to the cross by the evil men who wanted him dead? Then, in verse 18, the psalmist writes, “they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” That exact same thing happened to Jesus at his crucifixion at the hands of the Roman soldiers. And in verses 7 and 8 of the psalm, we read, “All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; ‘He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him.’” Sounds a whole lot like the people who passed by Jesus on the cross, along with the chief priests and scribes and elders, who said all kinds of mocking things to him as he hung there dying. This psalm is one of the clearest and passages of the Old Testament that directly points to Jesus. When we read it along with the crucifixion account, as we have in the service tonight, the connections could not be clearer.

But the one verse of Psalm 22 that speaks most profoundly to Jesus’ crucifixion is the very first one, in which the psalmist writes, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus quoted those exact words as he was dying on the cross, crying out to his Father in despair. And what those words show is that the experience of Jesus on the cross was even worse than it seemed at first glance. Not only was Jesus suffering physically, but he was suffering spiritually as well. He was literally being forsaken by his Father on the cross. God was hiding his face from his Son, so that all of his wrath against sin came crashing down upon the sinless Lamb of God. Jesus literally suffered hell as he hung there: the total absence of God, the complete removal of all of God’s good gifts. The persons of the Trinity were at war with each other, and Jesus was made to endure all of that war’s horrors. It was, without exaggeration, the worst thing to happen in the history of the world, and Jesus went through it all willingly so that all of us sinners could be saved. He knew that the Father’s justice and his wrath against sin needed to be satisfied, and he knew that he could offer himself up as a spotless sacrifice to atone for sin. So he did it. He allowed himself to be betrayed, arrested, mocked, beaten, and crucified. He shed his blood so that our sins might be atoned for and the wrath of God might be turned away from us. We are now forgiven for our sins because of what Jesus has done on our behalf, because he was willing to be forsaken by the Father so that such a fate would not befall us. Psalm 22 has been fulfilled in Jesus, and so we have been rescued from having to endure such sufferings ourselves.

But, in our haste to see Jesus in Psalm 22, we should not trick ourselves into thinking that this psalm is *only* about Jesus. Remember, Jesus himself did not write this psalm; yes, it points forward to him, but at first it was not about him. Rather, it was about the person who originally wrote it, who in this case was King David. Obviously, when David wrote this psalm, he was going through some very tough times. We don’t know what exactly was going wrong, but it sounds like it was very serious. Perhaps David wrote this before he became king, when King Saul was trying to kill him out of jealousy. Or maybe David wrote it when his son Absalom led a revolt against him and forced him to flee from Jerusalem for a time. Whatever the situation, David was clearly suffering greatly, and he was begging for God to help him. He felt like God had completely forsaken him in his distress. Now, we know that that was not literally true; God did not really leave David. He did literally do that to Jesus, but not to David. But David certainly felt like that was the case, and he did not hesitate to cry out to God for help, asking him where God was when David really needed him.

Perhaps there have been times when some of us here have felt like Psalm 22 was our psalm as well. If David was brought to the point of expressing such despairing sentiments to God, why wouldn’t that happen to us too? Why would we not lament the sufferings and sorrows of this sinful world in which we find ourselves? Anyone who has been through chronic illness, betrayal by a friend, financial ruin, or the death of a loved one knows what it’s like to be in distress. Really, even smaller issues can cause us to despair at times and wonder how we’re going to be able to cope. In such times as those, we too may wonder where God is and what he is doing. We may wonder why God doesn’t seem to be helping us through our difficult situation. We ourselves may want to shout out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Thankfully, though, our story does not end there. It never ends there. It always ends with God’s gracious word to us, a word of comfort, promise, and encouragement. Look at what happens in Psalm 22. David starts out with a cry of dereliction and despair, but he ends with an assured proclamation of hope and deliverance. The total switch in tone in the psalm is remarkable in its suddenness. It happens in the middle of a verse, in fact. Verse 21 reads, “Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!” One sentence pleads with God for salvation, and the very next sentence proclaims that salvation as having already been accomplished. From there, the rest of the psalm is as positive and joyful as the first part is negative and despairing. David proclaims, “You who fear the Lord, praise him…For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted…but has heard, when he cried to him…The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever!” This is quite the abrupt change. Do you think that’s because God suddenly saved David as he was in the middle of writing the psalm, and then he came back later and finished it after things had improved? I find that extremely hard to believe. What is much more likely is that David, after processing his feelings of abandonment and crying out to God for help, believed that God heard his cry and was confident that God would save him. David knew that God loved him, and would never leave him or forsake him. He knew that God had promised to remain with him and guide his steps forever, so no matter what was happening to him in his life then, he could always be confident in God’s mercy and graciousness toward him. So David would not fully give in to his despair, but he would instead look to the future with confidence and hope, knowing that God would indeed deliver him from his affliction. He didn’t know when it would happen or how exactly God would save him, but he trusted that salvation would eventually be coming.

We today also do not know exactly how God saved David from the situation that led him to compose Psalm 22, because we don’t know what that situation was. We do know, however, that God did deliver David from many difficulties throughout his life, so we know that David’s faith in him was well-founded. God never abandoned David, but he always remained with him as his merciful Lord and Savior. And we too can have that same assurance of God’s everlasting love and grace toward us. We too have received God’s promise to never leave us or forsake us. We too are his people, his beloved children whom he will always keep and protect. No matter what happens to us in this life, we can be absolutely certain that he will never forsake us, because he has already forsaken his Son in our place. Jesus suffered the agony of the cross and separation from his Father so that we would not have to experience them ourselves. By faith in his blood shed for us, we receive forgiveness for our sins and the promise of everlasting life in God’s kingdom. Thus, we, like David, can express the same absolute confidence in God’s grace toward us that is shown at the end of Psalm 22. Though we do suffer in this life, though we do go through great distress, we have God’s promises in Christ that it will not last forever. On the last day, we will rise to eternal life in the kingdom of God, just as Jesus rose from the dead on the third day.

And that brings us full circle back to Christ in Psalm 22. When we look for Jesus in this psalm, we typically focus on the passages I highlighted earlier: the hands and feet being pierced, the casting of lots for the clothes, the mockery of the bystanders, and the cry of dereliction: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” But we should never forget that like David and like us, Jesus himself also found salvation and restoration of his relationship with the Father. His suffering did not last forever; once he died, that was it. His blood was shed, our sins were atoned for, and he could say confidently even from the cross, “It is finished!” He could say this because he knew that death was not the final word for him. In his lowest point, in the depths of his suffering, he knew that he would be rising again from the dead in just a few days, and we know that this did indeed happen. Like David, Jesus could say these words from Psalm 22: “[God] has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.” Psalm 22 not only tells the tale of Jesus’ suffering, but it also proclaims his victory over his enemies. God would not forsake his Son or allow him to suffer forever; he would ultimately vindicate Jesus and everything he claimed about himself. God would show that Jesus was his beloved Son, the promised Christ, and the Savior of the world. Jesus would thus not only fulfill the prophecies of suffering in Psalm 22; he would fulfill their prophecies of victory too. Good Friday would last for only a few hours, but Easter would last for all eternity. And for those of us who trust in Jesus, who trust in the one who was crucified and rose again on the third day, we will share in Jesus’ eternal victory, in his everlasting reign in the kingdom of his Father. God may have forsaken Jesus for a time, but he will never forsake you. Amen.