

*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

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The Gospels tells us that, as He hung on the Cross, Jesus spoke seven times; the seven last words of Christ, as the Church has come to call them. Having the strength to say anything at all would have been enormously difficult. The scourging, the nails, even the positioning of the body on a cross, were all designed to hasten death by shock and exhaustion and asphyxia. Breathing would have been an excruciating ordeal; the challenge of actually saying any thing would have been immense. But in that moment, Christ spoke seven words that, throughout the centuries, have proven to be our words: words of terror and loneliness; words of fear and horror; words of despair and surrender; words that speak into our hearts as we struggle every day to follow the path that God has laid out before us: the path of compassion and love. This week, as we journey from the glory of the palms to the greater glory of the empty tomb, through the dark and terrifying road to the Cross, we will hear each of these seven words; and as we hear them again, we will think and pray about how they mark our own personal journeys: from fear to hope; from brokenness to healing; from death to life.

*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

Where is God when tragedy strikes? Maybe that question has filled your heart before. When tragedy has struck your life; or the life of someone you love. Where is God when human hearts turn to wickedness and evil? When nature rises up without warning to strike the innocent and the young? Or when the suffering gets to be too much to bear? Where is God in all the brokenness of our very broken world? Questions like these rise up every day; somewhere, someone, is struggling with some great sorrow; and when we do, we instinctively want answers. Something that we desperately hope will make sense of the senseless. But the fact is, so often we never get such answers. At best, sometimes we are given small glimpses and hints; assumptions and guesses; tiny windows into the mystery of hatred and suffering and evil. But, in the end, they're only glimpses. Nothing that really allows us to comprehend the incomprehensible; or rationalise the irrational.

But in the face of all of this, this much I think we do know: that the God who watched in horror as Cain murdered his brother Abel, setting in procession the long sad story of humanity's inhumanity; the God who saw the suffering and affliction of his people in Egypt; the God who has been witness to more horror and pain and violence than our hearts could even begin to contain, has watched and seen all of this not because he does not care about us. But because he cares so much more about us than we can possibly imagine. He cares so much about each and every one of us that he allows humanity, you and me and everyone else, the freedom to do and be whatever we choose to do and be; the freedom to chose life or death; the freedom to chose love or hate; light or darkness. The God who honoured us in a way unlike any other part of his great creation by making us in his own image, by giving us the freedom to will, is the God who chooses to honour that freedom. Even in those tragic moments when humanity chooses darkness and wickedness and evil, God refuses to

dishonour the image in which we were made; even when we choose to dishonour it in each other. God is not powerless to stop evil; but he instead allows us the freedom to choose, even when some choose darkness and sorrow rather than light and life.

That much we know. But even that is not the whole story. Because this God who watches does not watch as some uncaring or disinterested bystander; nor as some bored spectator. He watches as one who has chosen to enter into all of that darkness and wickedness and evil. That's what we see so clearly in the Cross: *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* That God does not simply sit back and let all of human brokenness and suffering unfold in its unrelenting sorrow. He takes all of that brokenness and suffering and pain upon himself; he lifts it from us and carries it to the Cross; he bears it with us and for us. So that even in those moments when we know the brokenness of human life most acutely; even in those moments when evil and violence become all too real; all too painfully evident; we know, because of the Cross, that Christ knows our sorrows because he has shared our sorrows. The cross is not simply the truth about the human condition in all its unrelenting reality. It is also the truth about God.

*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

In these words Christ's voice joins with the voice of everyone who has ever been oppressed, who has ever been tortured, who has ever been the victim of evil and hatred and malice. His cry is the cry of the forsaken, the lonely, the forgotten. If you have ever grieved; if you've ever wept in pain or depression or despair, then our Lord has joined his voice with yours. If you've ever thought that there is no one who understands and no one who knows what you're going through; that you have no one to talk to, our Lord Jesus cries out to you in love today from his cross.

And even as Christ enters into the fulness of fallen humanity's god-forsakenness; even as he experiences the full weight of our brokenness, the full reality of our wretchedness, the last word is not, either for him or for us, a word of sorrow and loss; nor is it a word of hopelessness or despair. The last word, for him and for us, is a word of trust: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*

The apparent silence of God when evil and wickedness reign is no evidence that God has forsaken us to the darkness. That he will never do. Because of the Cross. Because of what Christ carried for us. This silence is nothing more than a reminder that in the moments of our darkest sorrow words are so often powerless. In the moments of our darkest sorrow, when words fail us, all we need to know is that, even in the apparent silence, God is with us; not speaking words that our hearts would struggle to hear but just holding us in arms of mercy and love. And, in that loving, caring, healing, embrace, all we need to do is trust. As Jesus did on the Cross.

*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*

To trust that the God who loves us so much that he has made us in his image; the God who loves us so much that he has given us the incredible power to choose; the God who in his own Son has shown us the way of life and love, has promised to be with us every step of this journey. Even in those moments when we falter and fall. Until that moment comes when we will see the light of a new day driving away forever the darkness of the night. And the darkness of our hearts. Until we see the Day of Resurrection.