

A Homily for Good Friday, 2015
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“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

The haunting, aching cry that begins the Twenty-Second Psalm, the psalm Jesus cries out from the cross, speaks of terrible, existential aloneness. What are we to make of the Son of God, who, we are told, says these words from the cross as he dies? And what are we to make of the bystanders, still waiting for the big miracle, still waiting for the kind of Messiah they were hoping for, and not the kind of Messiah Jesus was – so eager for drama that they misheard the words of a psalm they surely knew, and thought that Jesus was calling for Elijah to return at last and rescue him?

Good Friday is, it seems, a day for hopes to be dashed. And the higher the hopes people had for Jesus, the further their hearts fell, to see their teacher, or their leader, or their healer, or their hero, or their Messiah, or, indeed, their God hanging in agony from the cross alongside the criminals and seditionists. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” must have been on the lips of many more than just Jesus on that terrible day.

And perhaps these word, or similar ones, have been on your lips at one time or another, when you felt not just terribly alone, but as if hope was running away, or had even run out altogether.

Good Friday speaks to that aloneness, that loss of hope in a unique way.

For one thing, it reminds us that some hopes need to die. Like the hopes for a militant Messiah that so absorbed and confounded those who stood around the cross that they couldn't even hear Jesus' plea, we all have hopes that keep us from hearing what God is saying to us: hopes that something unexpected will change our lives in ways that we ourselves are not working to accomplish; hopes that the world, the people we know, or know of, will be revealed to be or will become different than they are; hopes that we may always escape pain, sorrow, illness and death.

On Good Friday, we see that the world and its inhabitants are the way they are, and our hopes that they might have been different get nailed to the cross along with Jesus.

But that isn't the end of the story. The death of false hope can allow us to see that even though the world won't, by itself, change to suit us, there is goodness, and beauty, and hope in the way it is.

When the hope for a conquering hero, rescued at the last minute by Elijah, dies on the cross with Jesus, it becomes possible to see that God has in mind another kind of Savior, a deeper kind of salvation than what had been hoped for.

It's not the end of the story, and it's not the end of the psalm, either. The cry of anguish and terrifying abandonment that begins the psalm leads to a reflection on the way that God has always been with us, and leads to the realization, even in the dark heart of sorrow, that God will always be with us, in our pain, in our grief, in our loneliness, in our death.

On Good Friday, as we meditate on the cross of our Savior, we may lay our false hopes and vain expectations at the foot of the cross along with our flowers, to die with Jesus. We may lay our sorrows, and our sins, and our grievances, and our pain there as well. And we may thereby create a place in our hearts for better hopes, and truer ones; hopes that more closely match God's hopes for us. And in those newer, better hopes, we can abide with the God who has never forsaken us, no matter how alone we feel. And we can watch, and wait, and see what Easter brings.

Amen.