



March 25, 2016

**A Good Friday Sermon by Brent J. Eelman
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**The Chorus of the Cross
(The 4th Word/7 Last Words)**

Mark 15:34

At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, EE lo high, EE lo high – LAH muh – suh BAHK thah nee which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

There are many difficult passages within Gospels. But this one is one of the hardest and perhaps it is why we only preach it one day of the year. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” On the other 364 days of the year we preach, we sing, we proclaim the message of Deuteronomy 31:6, “ for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

But here we are confronted with the opposite sentiment. It is from the mouth of Jesus, among his last words.

My fear is that we often ignore these final words. “Not our Jesus, No! He wouldn't say that.” I have tried all my exegetical tricks on this passage, looking for a way to water it down and fit it within my comfortable theology: a theology that affirms God is always with us. God will never let us down. I pulled out my Greek New Testament... Is the translation faulty? No... The Greek is pretty clear. Both Mark and Matthew want to make sure that there is no question about what Jesus said, because they include the Aramaic words: *EE lo high, EE lo high – LAH muh – suh BAHK thah nee* . They wanted the reader to be clear about the message, “Why have you abandoned/forsaken me?”

You might be familiar with the Psalm 22, a lament which begins with the same question: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Some make the argument that Jesus' listeners would have known Psalm 22 and were aware that in the 24th verse, there is an affirmation that God does not abandon.

*he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.*

But Mark only included the first line... but Jesus recited the rest of the psalm. Matthew too? This argument is compelling, but not satisfying.

We should not dance around these words of Jesus. We should not water them down. We should not explain them away. When we do that, we rob the Christ's words of their power, their pain, and perhaps most importantly, their humanity. In our creeds we confess that Jesus was "fully God, fully human". These words on the cross challenge us to honor and affirm the full humanity of Christ.

But more... Jesus' lament conveys the reality of the cross.

- Those who have been abandoned,
- those who have been forsaken by family,
- by friends,
- by country,
- by those they love,
- by their church,
- by their community,
- by their pastor....

Those who have experienced both human and divine deprivation... Those who have cried out in their pain and suffering, "God, why have you forsaken me."

Those "least of these, brothers and sisters," who cry out with Christ... theirs is the chorus of the cross, the fellowship of the forsaken.

For too long we have been explaining away these words of our Lord, assuring our own fragile faith and brittle creeds, that Christ was not abandoned by his Father, our God.

No.... we need to hear these words of Christ in all their pain, but also hear with them the voices of all humanity who feel abandoned and forsaken. The voices that shout... the voices that have been silenced.

We also need to hear the voice emanating from our own souls, when we cry in our loneliness, our emptiness, our pain, our feeling of abandonment...

We need to acknowledge that we, too, cry out at times, "God, why have you forsaken me..."

And then acknowledge that we and all who cry that tortured tome.. are united with Christ in the chorus of the cross. Christ has joined us in our suffering. He has added his voice to our cries of lament. He has chosen to be with us in our experience of abandonment. This is the good news. Amen.