4th Wednesday in Lent
4th Word from the Crods
West Henrietta - 1962

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 27: 46 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?

Our text tonight takes us to the very heart of our Savior's passion. At nine o'clock in the morning Jesus had been crucified between two malefactors. His first thought was for the souls of His enemies and He prayed: Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. His love for the souls of men revealed itself further when He turned to the penitent malefactor with the words: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise. Then Jesus thought of His mother. Having been put under the law to redeem them that were under the law, He had been obedient to His mother all His life. And now, even in His suffering He could not forget her, and commends her to the disciple whom He loved with the tender words: Woman, behold thy son.

After these three utterances from the Cross Jesus remained silent. The mockery, the ridicule, the suffering and pain continued until at twelve o'clock noon it reached such an intensity that even nature began to cry out against it. The earth did quake, the sun hid her face in horror, and complete darkness covered the land for three hours. This was not an eclipse. It was the time of the full moon. God had wrapped a blanket of darkness around the earth as He did in the Egyptian plague. Heaven and earth were terrified to see what was done to the Son of God who had made them.

We are not told what the people did during those long hours of darkness. We know what Jesus did. He suffered as no one ever suffered before or after. The outward darkness was only a faint symbol of the dread darkness that covered His soul. Not a word passed over His lips during those dreadful hours. Patiently He endured it all. But close to the end of all this darkness and horror He cried out in excruciating agony and pain: Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani? - My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

There are few pains that go as deep as those caused by the feeling of forsakenness. Man is made to be loved, and when love is withdrawn, the heart is

deeply cut and hurt. A spanking might hurt a child, but not nearly as much as the withdrawal of a parent's love. Youth can endure many hardships, physical pains without flinching, but one thing that will get a young person down is the feeling that no one cares, that everyone has forsaken and forgotten him. A noted New York psychiatrist tells us that more women suffer from lack of love and loneliness than from any other cause.

Forsakenness was one of the worst pains which Christ had to endure for our redemption. The priests - the leaders of the church - who should have been the first to welcome Him maligned and slandered Him. The Jewish people who had been chosen as God's special people wouldn't have Him. The government, instituted by God to protect the innocent, maliciously condemned Him to death. The disciples, who had seen His miracles and heard His Words and had received His special blessing and love, forsook Him and fled. The prophecies of Isaiah had come true: We hid as it were our faces from Him.... He had to tread the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Him. Deeply as all this must have hurt our Savior, there was no word of complaint from His lips. But - now - when even God forsook Him and cast Him out of His presence, it almost became more than even the Son of God could bear. To be forsaken by all men is terrible. To be forsaken of God is hell. King Saul of the Old Testament persisted in his disobedience of God until, as we are told, God forsook Saul. And what a miserable life he had from that day on! The rich man who rejected God by rejecting Lazarus at his gate was forsaken by God and cast out of God's presence. And in hell he lifted up his voice and cried, I am tormented in this flame. That is the essence of hell - to be eternally separated from God. When Jesus, therefore, was cast out of God's presence, it is really no wonder that He cried, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

We cannot help but ask with Jesus, Why? Why was Jesus forsaken by the Father? How is it possible and how can it be? How can God be forsaken of God? With Luther we have to exclaim: Jesus forsaken of God! Who can understand it? If this cry of agony had come from the lips of the hypocritical priests and Pharisees,

that we could understand. If this cry of pain had come from the lips of the Jews who yelled, His blood be upon us and our children, that we could understand. If this cry from the tortures of hell had come from that coward Pontus Pilate or from the lips of the malefactors who had wasted their lives in sin, that we could understand. But, this cry of agony comes from the innocent lips of the holy Son of God in whom there was no sin and in whose spirit there was no guile. Why was He forsaken of God and compelled to endure such agony?

There is, of course, only one explanation, and that is the explanation which Scripture itself gives. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.... God made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin.... He made His soul an offering for sin. Christ was rejected by God as the Substitute for sinful man. All the turtures due to us were heaped upon Me. Who can begin to describe the agony that was His? The punishment for one sin is damnation and hell. What must have been the agony of Christ, who wasn't suffering for one sin nor for the sins of one man, but who was suffering for the sins of the whole world - all the people who had lived, who were living then, and who were going to live? If the punishment for one sin is hell, and Christ was afflicted for the sins of all people of all times, is it any wonder that He cried out in His great agony, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

From all of this one thing become crystal clear - God has an intense hatred of sin. As the Holy God He will punish sin. The statement of many, Surely God won't be so cruel as to send any one to hell, becomes utter nonsense in the presence of Calvary. The false hopes of those who feel that they can live in sin as they please and have heaven, too, are banished forever. God is merciful and forgiving. His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting. But He is also just and holy He cannot simply disregard sin. Sin must be punished, and here on Calvary God demonstrates that He will do it. What a warning to all who live in wilful sin or who have some particular pet sin which they will not let go! If God spared not His own Son, His only beloved Son, but sent Him through the agonies of hell, what will He do to those who wilfully trample His grace under foot and flagrantly reject His

love? If this was done to a green tree, what will happen to the dry? Be careful now. I have warned you soon enough. Any one who feels that he can continue in sin, despise God's forgiveness and mercy in Christ - let him beware! He will stand before the Judgment seat of Christ! Therefore, seek Him while He may yet be found!... Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation!

Tonight as I look at the Cross this truth comes home: Jesus was forsaken of God for me.... for me! He was forsaken that I might never be forsaken. He was forsaken of God also for you - if only you will own Him as your Savior! Sometimes when we stand up for the truth of this Gospel we stand very much alone. People ridicule us for our narrow-mindedness. In those hours it is a comfort to know that God is with us. Some of you young people may feel quite lonely at times because you believe in keeping yourselves chaste and clean and for that reason find yourselves forsaken by the crowd. What a comfort then to know that you are not alone: that God is with you. Some of you are sick; others of you have personal problems and family problems to face. If in your weaker moments you wonder whether God has forsaken you, is perhaps even punishing you for your sins, then remember - Christ was forsaken and rejected for you and your sins. You are God's children through your faith in Christ Jesus, and therefore God will never forsake you nor punish you for your sins. God will not forsake you while you live; nor when you die. Your sins are fully atoned for. Since Jesus was punished, we will not be punished. Since Jesus was condemned, we will not be condemned. Since Jesus was forsaken and rejected by God and sent into the agonies of hell, we who have accepted Him as our Savior cannot be rejected. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us... There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? was the cry of Jesus' deepest agony. It is our assurance of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal blessedness. On your knees then again tonight in deepest sorrow that your sins have caused Christ such agony! On you feet again to praise and thank Him for His patient suffering and unspeakable love!

Amen.