

Psalm 130
Mark 15:33-38
April 21, '11
Maundy Thursday

“WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”

THIS WEEK, IN JEWISH HOMES ACROSS THE WORLD, A CHILD ASKS, “*WHY IS THIS NIGHT DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER NIGHTS?*”

TONIGHT, IT IS A QUESTION THAT WE CAN ASK AS CHRISTIANS AS WELL.

“*WHY IS THIS NIGHT DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER NIGHTS?*”

THIS NIGHT IS DIFFERENT.

DURING LENT THIS YEAR, WE HAVE BEEN FOCUSING ON “QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED.”

WE’VE BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED OF HIS FRIENDS, QUESTIONS HE ASKED OF HIS DISCIPLES & QUESTIONS HE ASKED OF THOSE IN NEED.

BUT THIS NIGHT IS DIFFERENT.

TONIGHT, WE CONSIDER A QUESTION JESUS ASKED OF GOD.

YES, THIS NIGHT IS DIFFERENT.

VIRTUALLY EVERY TIME WE GATHER TO WORSHIP, IT’S ON A SUNDAY.

WE WORSHIP ON SUNDAY BECAUSE IT’S THE DAY OF RESURRECTION & EVERY TIME WE WORSHIP IT IS A CELEBRATION OF RESURRECTION.

BUT NOT TONIGHT.

THIS NIGHT IS DIFFERENT.

WE DON’T GATHER TONIGHT TO CELEBRATE RESURRECTION.

IN FACT, WE DON’T GATHER TO CELEBRATE AT ALL.

OVER THE YEARS, I HAVE PASSIONATELY ENCOURAGED PEOPLE TO BE SURE NOT TO MISS THE MAUNDY THURSDAY SERVICE OF WORSHIP.

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SURPRISED THAT MORE PEOPLE AREN’T IN ATTENDANCE AT A SERVICE ON THIS NIGHT.

TO ME, THE FACT THAT THIS NIGHT IS DIFFERENT HAS ALWAYS MADE IT SPECIAL.

I HAVE COME TO REALIZE, THOUGH, THAT ONE REASON SOME ARE RELUCTANT TO ATTEND A SERVICE TONIGHT IS PRECISELY BECAUSE IT IS DIFFERENT.

THEY WOULD MUCH RATHER MOVE SMOOTHLY FROM THE “HOSANNAS” OF PALM SUNDAY TO THE “HALLELUJAHS” OF EASTER & NEVER GIVE A THOUGHT TO WHAT TOOK PLACE BETWEEN THE TWO CELEBRATIONS.

THEY’RE AFRAID OF HONESTY & AFRAID OF AGONY.

IN JESUS, THERE IS BOTH.

THERE IS HONESTY & THERE IS AGONY IN HIS QUESTION FROM THE CROSS.

THERE IS HONEST AGONY, NOT ONLY IN THE PSALM THAT JESUS QUOTES – THE 22ND – BUT ALSO IN THE PSALM WE READ EARLIER – THE ONE WE WILL HEAR AGAIN FROM THE CHOIR IN JUST A FEW MINUTES.

WE’VE ALL BEEN THERE, HAVEN’T WE?

THERE IS A PAIN INSIDE THAT DEFIES DESCRIPTION – AN ACHING THAT HURTS SO DEEPLY THAT IT FEELS AS THOUGH WE HAVE BEEN VIRTUALLY ABANDONED BY GOD.

THAT’S WHY THIS NIGHT IS DIFFERENT.

WE’RE NOT HERE WITH SMILING FACES, MASKING OUR PAIN & DENYING OUR FEELING OF DIVINE ABANDONMENT AS WE SO OFTEN DO WHEN WE GATHER TOGETHER ON SUNDAY MORNING.

TONIGHT WHEN JESUS CRIES OUT – “*MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?*” – TONIGHT, WHEN THE PSALMIST EXCLAIMS – “*OUT OF THE DEPTHS I CRY TO YOU, O LORD*” – THOSE CRIES ARE OUR CRIES.

THEY’RE REAL & THEY’RE HONEST & THEY’RE AGONIZING.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO AREN’T HERE TONIGHT, THOUGH, BECAUSE THEY’RE AFRAID OF SUCH HONESTY.

THEY’D MUCH PREFER TO PRETEND THAT EVERYTHING IS FINE – AND EVEN IF IT’S NOT – THEY CAN’T BRING THEMSELVES TO QUESTION GOD FOR THEIR ADVERSITY.

BUT NOT YOU – AND NOT THE PSALMIST – AND NOT JESUS.

THERE’S A STORY FROM THE 18TH CENTURY ABOUT A RABBI WHO SENT FOR A TAILOR & ASKED HIM TO REPORT ON HOW HIS DISPUTES WITH GOD HAD GONE THE PREVIOUS DAY.

THE TAILOR SAID, “*I TOLD GOD – ‘YOU WANT ME TO REPENT OF MY SINS, BUT I HAVE ONLY COMMITTED SLIGHT TRANSGRESSIONS.*

MAYBE I HAVE STOLEN A LITTLE LEFTOVER CLOTH, OR EATEN IN A NON-JEWISH HOME WITHOUT WASHING MY HANDS AFTER WORKING THERE.

BUT YOU, LORD. YOU HAVE COMMITTED GREAT SINS.

YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY LITTLE CHILDREN FROM THEIR MOTHERS, AND MOTHERS FROM THEIR LITTLE CHILDREN.

LET’S CALL IT QUITS. YOU FORGIVE ME & I WILL FORGIVE YOU.”

THE RABBI SAID TO THE TAILOR, “*WHY DID YOU LET GOD OFF THE HOOK SO EASILY?*”

JESUS DOESN’T LET HIM OFF THE HOOK.

NOR SHOULD YOU.

BECAUSE IF YOU DON’T – IF, IN YOUR AGONY, YOU CRY OUT IN HONESTY - GOD WILL ACKNOWLEDGE THAT HONESTY BY GIVING YOU A GLIMPSE OF WHAT IT IS THAT YOU MOST DESPERATELY DESIRE – HE WILL GIVE YOU A GLIMPSE OF HOPE.

FOR HOPE IS BORN IN DESPAIR.

HOPE FINDS ITS WINGS IN THE VERY MIDST OF ADVERSITY.

THE PSALM THAT JESUS QUOTES FROM THE CROSS BEGINS WITH, “*MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?*”

BUT IT ENDS WITH, “*FUTURE GENERATIONS WILL BE TOLD ABOUT THE LORD, AND PROCLAIM HIS DELIVERANCE TO A PEOPLE YET UNBORN, SAYING THAT HE HAS DONE IT!*”

HOPE TRIUMPHS IN THE END.

THE PENITENTIAL 130TH PSALM BEGINS WITH, “*OUT OF THE DEPTHS I CRY TO YOU, O LORD,*” BUT IT ENDS WITH, “*IT IS HE WHO WILL REDEEM YOU, O ISRAEL. HOPE IN THE LORD.*”

HOPE ALWAYS HAS THE LAST WORD.

FROM THE BLOOD-STAINED CROSS ON FRIDAY, JESUS CRIED TO GOD IN AGONY.

FROM THE EMPTY TOMB ON SUNDAY, HE DISPLAYED GOD’S GLORY.

I’M GLAD WE’RE HERE TONIGHT BECAUSE THIS NIGHT IS DIFFERENT.

TONIGHT IS THE NIGHT OF HONEST AGONY AS WELL AS THE NIGHT OF THE BIRTH OF HOPE. AMEN.

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