

Jesus' sacrifice

Fifth Sunday

Read: Matthew 27:45-53

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). 47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah." 48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 49 The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him." 50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split 52 and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

Some thoughts:

Lent is the season leading up to "Holy Week" when we remember Jesus' last supper, betrayal, trial and crucifixion. For many of us the story is almost too familiar. We have read it so many times, sung about it in hundreds of songs, and seen countless images of the cross or crucifixion. It is important to ask God to give us a fresh glimpse of what Jesus has done for us.

For me (Sam), a fresh experience of the crucifixion came from listening to a recording of composer James MacMillan's "Seven Last Words From The Cross". This discordant, uncomfortable, visceral work for choir and strings sets Jesus' final words as he hung on the cross. If you can, find a recording of it and spend some time experiencing it for yourself. One of the most striking sections of the piece is the setting of Jesus' cry:

"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')" (Matt. 27:46)

The word "forsaken" means "abandoned" or "deserted". It describes the wilderness experience of Israel, and the wilderness we all feel from time to time. Jesus is taking upon himself all laments of Israel through the ages, quoting the desperate lament of Psalm 22 in his moment of deepest despair. (read Psalm 22:1-18 for yourself).

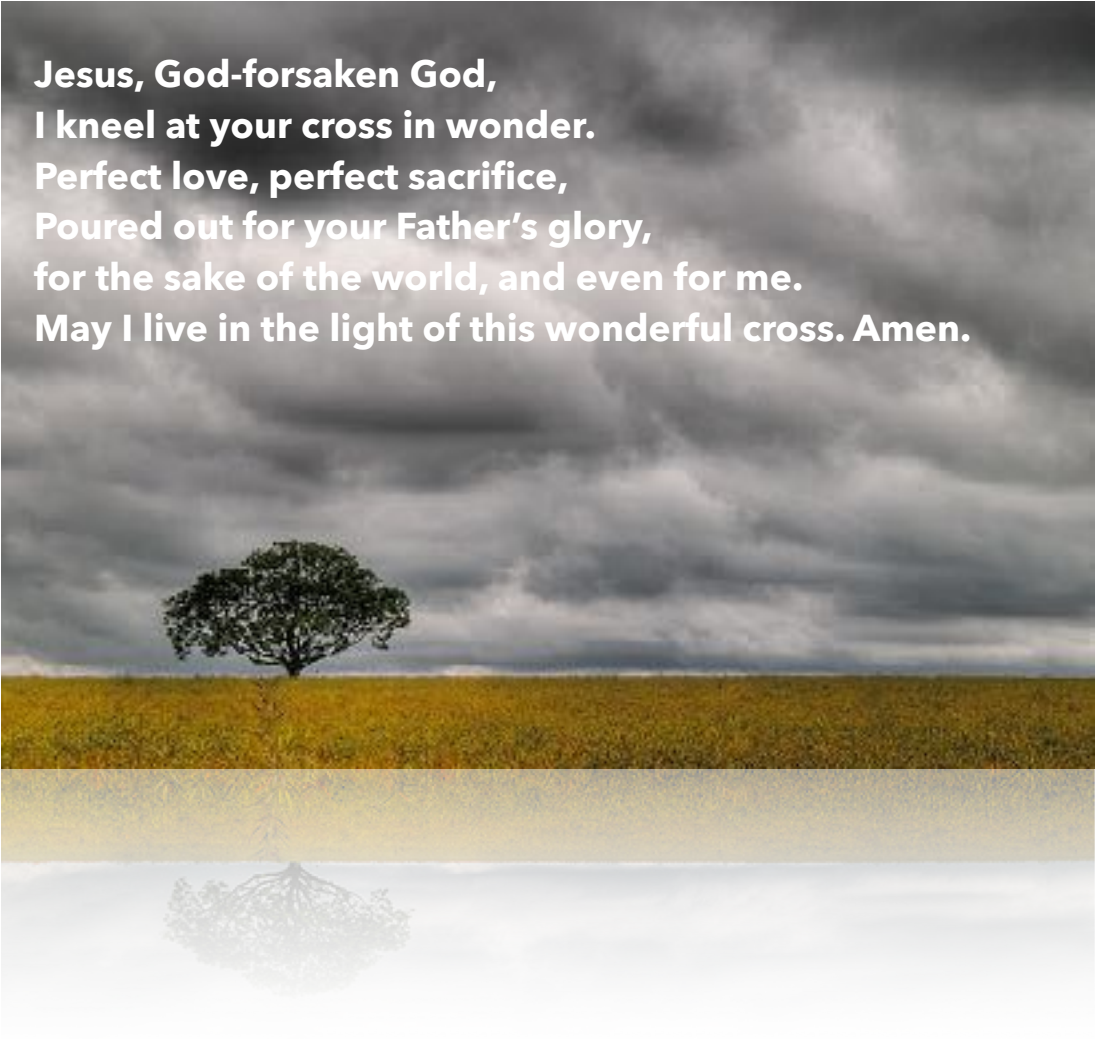
Reflect: Have you ever felt forsaken, abandoned, or deserted? How does it feel to know that Jesus experienced the most extreme version of that?

Jesus was fully human, entirely identifying with our brokenness. But we miss the full implications of this picture if we do not remember that he was also fully God, eternally the second person of the Trinity. What must it have felt like for that everlasting relationship to be broken, cut off, "God-forsaken"? Theologian Tom Wright comments:

"...the whole point of the cross is that there the weight of the world's evil really did converge on Jesus, blotting out the sunlight of God's love as surely as the light of day was blotted out for three hours..... The sin of the "many", which he is bearing, has for the first and only time in his experience caused a cloud to come between him and the father he loved" Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*, page 190.

This week, as we consider the "sacrifice" of wilderness worship, let us begin by kneeling at the cross. Here Jesus makes the ultimate, once-for-all sacrifice for us. He deals with every consequence of our sin, our shame, our wilderness.

Pray: Make this prayer your own:



**Jesus, God-forsaken God,
I kneel at your cross in wonder.
Perfect love, perfect sacrifice,
Poured out for your Father's glory,
for the sake of the world, and even for me.
May I live in the light of this wonderful cross. Amen.**