

We are coming close to the end of the Gospel of Mark. In the text today, we actually reach the climax of what Mark has been drawing towards. There's a particular line in which everything has been pointing toward, and we'll get there in a little bit.

We Christians are a peculiar people, or at least we ought to be a peculiar people. When we are living rightly, when we are following Jesus rightly, we are a peculiar people. We're unusual. We're strange. We're different. That being said, when we are compromised, we are actually quite conventional. We blend in with the world around us. We fit right in with the systems and societal norms of what is going on in the world to our left and to our right. But when we are truly who we are meant to be, we are a peculiar people.

Why? Well, it's because of the text we just read. We worship a crucified God, and this very reality, this concept of God being crucified, of saying that there is a day in which God died, confounds every system of power. It confounds every religious conception of what God or the divine should be like. It confounds ordinary wisdom. I would argue that it confounds the world. We celebrate the crucified God.

It was Good Friday in 1966 when *Time* magazine ran that famous cover that I'm sure you have seen before, which posed the question, "Is God Dead?" Now, to understand this, there are a few different questions we would need to ask. The first is, what do you mean by God? Second, what do you mean by dead? Both questions need clarification, but the cover story of this particular article or magazine was about the shift that was taking place socially from the complacent faith of the 1950s to the more confused faith of the mid-1960s.

The cover story became the clarion call of the new atheism that was born in the 60s. It was a testimony of the cultural crisis of faith that was happening right beneath the surface. But this story, this cover, is drawing on a deeper and older source in which Frederick Nietzsche was writing a century earlier or so in which he penned the poem called *The Madman*. This poem in which a guy runs into the middle of a crowd, and he's out of his right mind. He's calling out to the crowd, "Where is God? Where is God?" The people begin to laugh and mock him, and they begin to throw questions at the madman.

But he responds with this disorientation. He's wrestling with this concept of "Where is God?" And he says at one point, "Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition?" And then famously he writes, "Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him." This idea of the death of God, this catchphrase, *God Is Dead*, became a rallying cry for the atheist movement that was rising. And certainly, Nietzsche was one who, speaking here in philosophical

terms, had a hatred towards Christianity, a hatred towards the way of Jesus.

Yet the interesting point, as Mark has alluded to throughout his gospel, is the paradox that every time you try to heap what the world could throw at you, God is dead; it actually, through a side door, is the very center of our Christian faith. Albeit, I may augment Nietzsche's phrase a little bit and say God did die. But he still is alluding to the very reality that at the center of the Christian faith is a God who is dead.

Now, I'm stretching his intent here. His point was much more to say the rise of the modern world means we no longer have a need for God. Give us enough time with enough progress, and we will solve all the ills that the world could have. The problem with that is that right after this, we see the rise of World War I, we see the rise of World War II, we see the Holocaust take place, we watch devastation after devastation, and ultimately, that was the bloodiest century in world history. I'm not quite sure exactly if we figured it out. What, then, does it mean that God is dead, that God died? Fleming Rutledge, an author, theologian, and Episcopal priest, writes this.

The crucifixion is the touchstone of Christian authenticity, the unique feature by which everything else, including the resurrection, is given its true significance. It is the crucifixion that marks out Christianity as something definitively different in the history of religion. It is in the crucifixion that the nature of God is truly revealed. Rutledge

My point this morning, as we look unflinchingly at the cross, is the crucified Jesus is the greatest revelation of who God is. Because we recognize the cross is the very center point of our faith. That, in some ways, is not anything too shocking. But yet, when we pause and slow down, we realize this claim that God died is profoundly unique in the history of our world.

So again, this morning, we come to a funeral reflection of God himself hanging on the cross. We want to pause, and we want to, as best we can, reserve the celebration of resurrection, which is to come. And that will be celebrated next week as we bring that text to bear. But may we not rush past the intensity of the cross and remember that God died.

Of course, we know the whole story. But I'm going to ask us to reserve that. I'm going to ask us to sit in this moment because there's something about this moment that wasn't just about a transition to resurrection but, as Rutledge says, and as I believe, the cross is the greatest revelation of the very character of God.

Mark has been moving quickly through this gospel, quickly through the stories of Jesus, and yet when we get to the cross, he slows way down

and spends quite a bit of time unraveling this particular story. So, our goal this morning is to look at the three phases in which Mark tells the story of Jesus' death. First, we'll see the crucifixion of Jesus. Second, there's a whole section on the very death of Jesus. And third, we'll see the burial of Jesus.

Let's begin with the crucifixion. [Mark 15:21-24](#)

Remember the scenes that we've come from as we begin this part of the story. Jesus was on trial before the religious leaders. He walked through that. He was on trial before the political establishment. He walked through that. And we ended with Pilate sentencing him to be crucified. They are now moving from the flogging of Jesus with Pilate to the crucifixion of Jesus. It's believed it was probably about a 600-yard walk, not all that far. But Jesus would have been carrying the crossbeam of his cross. Most likely, the upward beam would have already been planted and waiting. So the crossbeam is what he is carrying from the Praetorium to this place called Golgotha, the Place of the Skull.

It's a little bit ominous, wouldn't you say? Jesus is making his way there, and most likely, he's been through a lot at this time. Many didn't survive the flogging that he had just gone through. Someone's walking by, a man named Simon. There's another character in his gospel that we understand as Simon. Do you remember that one? Simon Peter. And it's interesting, at the moment, the height of where Jesus is at, where Simon had just failed, we see this other Simon, this new Simon, and what is he doing? He's picking up a cross and carrying it for Jesus. This should give us illusions of what Jesus had taught earlier when he said, "If you want to follow me, you must take up your cross."

Simon of Cyrene is this nebulous character. He hasn't been in the spotlight; we just met him. And yet Jesus puts him at the very center of the action. He says, look at this disciple, this person who's doing exactly what Jesus had asked. Where the others had failed, Simon of Cyrene seems to be figuring it out.

So he takes up the cross, they walk up to Golgotha, and then you get this haunting verse where it simply says, "*It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.*" Mark is not interested in elaborating on the violent, gory details of what a crucifixion was, and I won't either to hold to Mark's intent. But everyone in the first century would have understood this crucifixion. You almost get the sense that Mark couldn't bring himself to describe what was taking place because of its haunting, gory nature. But they crucify him, they put him on the cross, and it's not because it's insignificant. There's a tenderness in Mark's writing here. Everyone in that first century understood the complexity of these four words, "And they crucified him."

[Mark 15:25-27](#) We don't have time to get into this, but do you remember what James and John asked for when the disciples were hearing about Jesus predicting the cross? Can we be on your right? It's another illusion that here, too, some really pretty radical outsiders or rebels are on Jesus' right and his left as he's brought up into glory, and Mark wants us to contrast that. We thought the 12 disciples were the ones who had it figured out, but over and over, they failed. These unlikely people begin

to take on the very posture of a disciple. So it says they crucified two rebels with him.

[Mark 15:29-32](#) Mark is intentionally using paradox and irony. He's trying to help us see all of this leading up to the very fact, not that Jesus at this moment is defeated, although he certainly is, but rather the coronation of this king is one in which these things must take place—this beating, this suffering, this humiliation, the heaping of insults. All this is intended, very intentionally, unavoidably so, that this is the very way the king is crowned.

So the three people, they are crying out to him, they're mocking him; there are the chief priests and the teachers of the law, those passing by, the rebels on each side... everyone is mocking and heaping insults onto Jesus in such a way that you are almost caught by the fact that Jesus still is choosing his words very, very carefully. He rarely speaks out. The moments that we've seen Mark actually communicate the words of Jesus are never out of retaliation but rather out of a response, a cry from the deepest.

Jesus, you see, will enter into his glory, not through the typical means of a king in a kingdom that we would expect, but rather through suffering and death, through enduring awful torture. It's clear that those who were there that were trumpeting loyalty to Jesus all along could never have conceived that God would die, that the Christ, the Messiah, would be raised to kingship, not through a triumphal power but actually quite much more so a triumph, a laying down of one's life.

[Mark 15:33](#) It's now been three hours, which, in the scheme of a crucifixion, is actually quite short. You'll see that later when Pilate is confused that Jesus had already died. The intention of the cross was to make it last as long as possible. I believe that's why they were offering myrrh and wine mixed with other elements. It was a narcotic trying to keep him alive, to make him suffer even longer. But yet here at noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

This is the middle of the day. We recognize this is an unnatural darkness. So what's going on here? There's a lot of things. This wasn't, as some have claimed, a solar eclipse. No, this was the time of Passover. Passover would have been the time of the full moon. There was no solar eclipse going on here. There's something more happening. From a literary perspective, darkness should trigger a few different stories in our minds. But the one I want to highlight is from the very beginning of the scriptures in Genesis 1, the very beginning of the story of our Bible.

[Genesis 1:1-2](#)

This scene here in Genesis 1 is the beginning of everything, its pre-creation. It's before the poem explodes, and God begins to create land and sea and animals and trees and humans and light and separate waters from darkness. It's the state before all of that takes place.

The phrase in verse two, "Now the earth was formless and empty," this phrase in Hebrew is an important one. It's the phrase, *tohu va vohu*, which is really fun to say! But it is important because you'll watch this phrase pop up in a few different places. Its intent is to help us understand that the pre-created order is one of utter chaos. This is what

darkness looked like. The waters in the ancient imagination were not the place in which we could go on a cruise and travel across the Atlantic. It was one of fear. It was one of the unknown. It says that the spirit of God is hovering over the waters. There it's formless, it is void, it's chaotic, it's a nothingness, a hollowness. There's a brokenness to the world in this place, or a rawness is probably a better phrase for it, in which there's this chaos, there's un-creation.

Of course, we know how Genesis 1 unfolds. God begins to speak his Word. Later in the New Testament, when Jesus would be known as the Word of God, there's a sense in which The Word enters into chaos and begins to create. God spoke, and there was light. God spoke, and there were animals. God spoke, and there was a separation between the heavens and the earth. God spoke, and there was all of this order that was bursting forth. There's a new creative energy in the world that's unleashed by the very words of God. It's creation breaking out of anti-creation.

When Mark, in Mark 15, is talking about darkness over the whole land, there's a sense in which what's happening now to the very Word of God is a fracturing of creation in such a way that uncreation is happening. The world feels like it's fracturing. Why is there darkness? Because the world is coming undone. The text I opened in our call to worship in Colossians 3 says that Christ sustains all things and holds all things together. What happens when that sustainer dies? Creation begins to fracture and break apart and crumble, and there's darkness and earthquakes. That's what the other gospel accounts would say. There was a loud rupture, and creation was coming apart. This is why the centurion, later, when he's looking at this scene, who probably had watched thousands of people die before, says, "Surely there's something different about this person's death; surely he was the son of God."

There's something unique about this moment and all of this uncreation taking place. There's disorientation, there's disintegration. When we withdraw from God, this is the trajectory of our lives. For the wages of sin is death. That's what you earn when you venture from God, when you take on the very posture of God, moving and distancing yourself from God. What unfolds is anti-creation. Creation begins, this is war, this is death, this is disease. It's not the created order. It's creation trying to find its footing away from God.

[Mark 15:34](#) Mark is specific here. He doesn't want us to miss this cry of Jesus from the cross, so he gives it in the original language, and then he translates it for the current readers so that we lean in to "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

There's a book on my shelf at home that, honestly, I haven't opened much. It's by a guy named F. F. Bruce. As I was writing my sermon, I looked up, and it was on the bottom of my shelf. The title of the book is *Hard Sayings of Jesus*. So I thought, this one's a hard saying of Jesus. I got up and pulled that book off the shelf. The very last chapter of this book is about this particular phrase of Jesus. The first sentence of that chapter of the book entitled *Hard Sayings of Jesus* is this, "This is the hardest of all hard sayings." I couldn't help but laugh as there was a trepidation about trying to understand this particular phrase. But Bruce goes on

and says this, which is a bit humbling. "This at least must be said. If it is a hard saying for the reader of the Gospels, it was hardest of all for our Lord himself."

There's a moment in this phrase when Jesus from the cross cries out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" There's a moment in which words, categories, and theological constructs begin to fall apart. I have looked at this particular phrase and tried to understand what's happening here. And if I'm quite honest, it has humbled me. There's little that I really am certain of and what is taking place at this moment when you see God in Christ crying out that he is abandoned by God. We try to hold this together and make sense of it, but the reality is there is something deeply mysterious that's taking place here. There's something profound in which God is experiencing something within the very triune Godhead of Himself that we don't fully understand. We try with songs and books to make sense of this, but I've come to the conclusion that we don't really know what's happening here other than Jesus is experiencing agony. God the Father is experiencing an agony that we could never imagine.

So when we get to this question when we get to this particular phrase, I come with much humility when I try to unpack its depth, and I hope that rather than thinking we walk out with an explanation, I hope we walk out with a mystery. I hope we walk out with a sense of God going through something we could have never imagined. See, there's a moment in here in which the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who live in a triune relationship, a three in oneness—is always self-sacrificing, loving the other in which there is no hierarchy, in which God is serving the Son and the Son the Spirit and the Spirit the Father and vice versa.

This triune God is fracturing from grief. And for me, we easily see the grief of Jesus in which he is experiencing agony and pain. What we often miss is God the Father experiencing profound grief as well. Where Jesus is experiencing the grief of death and sin, God is experiencing the grief of the death of his very Son, his very child, which I don't know if there's a category that is greater than the loss of a child. So there's this mutuality of grief in which God the Father sees this moment in which it had to be in this way where the crucified God is there, and within this relationship, there is this mutuality of self-love, that never changes, but there's a mutuality now in which grief has entered into the scene. And Jesus can do nothing but cry out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

Now, this is most assuredly where scholars are very, very confident of this, that Jesus here is reciting Psalm 22. And I believe, and scholars as well, that he's actually praying through all of Psalm 22 at the time. But Mark records this first verse at the beginning. It opens with, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

What's stunning about the particular psalm that I believe is foreshadowing Jesus, but I would argue we understand Psalm 22 backwards in light of Jesus. We go back to that and begin to understand the depth of it. In that psalm, you see them talking about being crushed. They talk about his clothes being distributed or gambled for. So, we see all of this

in this particular story. No doubt Mark is pulling out, in a narrative form, what the poet in Psalm 22 is unpacking. And it says in [Psalm 22:1-2](#).

This is the heart cry of a man hanging on a cross, who's experiencing death that he did not deserve. It's the unleashing of injustice onto this Jesus in which he's experiencing a chilliness in which that relationship he had known seems fractured.

But I don't believe that the Father turned his face away. I don't believe that's what took place. Later in Psalm 22, you'll see the fact that it is Jesus praying this prayer who says very bluntly that his face did not turn away. There's something to this that there's again a mutuality of grief. Here's Psalm 22:24, the verse I just alluded to. *"For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help."* God is ever-present right there in the moment of the cross, not turning his face away but rather experiencing a mutuality of grief, agony, and suffering.

There's a sense in which Jesus now is utterly alone. There is no divine way in which he's getting out of the cross, and he's crying out, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* But God did not abandon Jesus in that place; rather, God experienced that same grief. It is both of them pouring their wrath out on sin.

Revelation would talk about the wrath of the Lamb on sin; that's Jesus. Isaiah would talk about the wrath of God on sin; that's God the Father. There's a sense in which they're both entering into the darkness of this place, pouring out their wrath on sin. And it is in that moment in which there's this agony, this depth of brokenness, where all Jesus can do is cry out, *"Oh my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

To Jesus, God did not abandon him; he was just silent. It's not abandonment. He's utterly alone. God was, in Christ, experiencing all of our God-forsakenness. That feeling of forsakenness was profound, but I don't believe God hid his face. And the reason I make this point so elaborately if you will, is because this has tremendous implications for how we relate to God. Jesus is not saving us from an angry God. He's saving us from the wrath of sin. He's saving us from the sin in which the wages are death, of uncreation, of anti-creation. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit intervening on our behalf, substituting themselves for our sin, taking on that very wrath so that we can find a new way. Look at verse 35. *"When some of those standing near heard this, they said, 'Listen, he's calling Elijah.'"*

This is simply a mishearing. Eloi, Eloi would have sounded like Elijah, Elijah, so they simply thought, maybe it's Elijah. And if you remember, Elijah, he's the one who didn't die. He was just taken up into heaven and they thought maybe he was calling him back down. Maybe he'll come back at this moment.

[Mark 15:36-37](#) There's a humility in the way Mark writes this. It's simply just like before, and they crucified him here, and Jesus breathed his last. This is the moment in which God died. Blood stopped pumping. The body began to grow cold, and he breathed his last. God died. At this moment there's something that erupts from this instance. Again, this is what we were alluding to earlier.

[Mark 15:38-41](#) When Jesus dies, this fracture takes place, and there's a sense in which the temple, the curtain that blocked the common area from the holy of holies, tears right in two. This is also another allusion to God's presence in this that the curtain is breaking. Now, this curtain was massive. This was not some accidental thing. It would have been around 60 feet tall, maybe around 30 feet wide, and 10 inches thick. This was not a subtle accident. This was an intentional fracturing of the very veil that separated the people from the Holy of Holies.

Remember, in the Old Testament, the Tabernacle, the temple was the place in which you went to encounter God's presence. At that time, that was the only way you encountered God's presence. You went to the temple, and inside that was the Holy of Holies where God's presence dwelt uniquely. And once a year, one man was allowed to cross that veil into the Holy of Holies, where they would offer a sacrifice, a propitiation. The blood of the lamb would go in so that it would create a right relationship with God. One man, one time a year. And even then, they were so sacred they would tie a rope around that man before he would go in, and the thought was if he died from being in the very presence of God, at least they could drag him out of the room! There was an intensity to this moment, so when Jesus died, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two, it was, in some ways, the final judgment that Jesus dispelled on the temple.

Remember all these events leading up to this—when he flips the table, he's judging the temple, he's judging the corruption, the old way in which we had to encounter God was through these means. But now we have the spotless lamb of God, this Jesus, Son of God, whose death is, in fact, that sacrifice. Because what was in the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant. And inside the Ark of the Covenant, there were three things. There was the stone tablets of the commandments that Moses received. There was the jar of manna that was representative of God's sustenance as they were wandering around the wilderness. And there was Aaron's staff.

Now, for all sorts of reasons that we just don't have time to go into, these three things you can link back to the failure of Israel. So within the Ark of the Covenant are three things that have all sorts of meaning, but one of them is that they continually failed. They needed the commandments, they needed the manna, they needed Aaron. It's representative of failure, but here's the beauty of it. On top of the Ark of the Covenant is the mercy seat of God in which when this one person would go in once a year, they would take the blood of a sacrificial lamb and they would sprinkle it on top of the mercy seat as a way of not counting judgment on the people, but God's mercy.

The curtain was now torn in two. We don't have to tiptoe around these sorts of practices and rituals to get into the presence of God, when that rips wide open, what we now have is access directly to the very mercy of God. The blood of Jesus poured out over the mercy seat, quite literally on top of the failures of Israel, and we experience the mercy of God.

Jesus breathed his last, but even in that moment, life begins to burst forth because the mercy of God extends beyond that. Mark brilliantly

demonstrates the reality of the curtain tearing in the next phrase in verse 38. And this is, I believe, the climax statement, the climax sentence of the Gospel of Mark. *“And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!” (v. 39).*

Now, to make the point that this is the climax, you have to go all the way back to the very first verse of the Gospel of Mark, where Mark lets the reader in on his thesis, but not those that are within the story. Mark 1:1, the beginning, another allusion to Genesis, the beginning of the good news, that's gospel, that's that word about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. So we know who Jesus is. But this Roman centurion, which is the irony of ironies, the most outsider, is the first sane person to declare the actual identity of Jesus in the entire Gospel of Mark.

No one has figured it out except for this Roman centurion who, when he saw how Jesus died, he confessed, “Surely this man was the Son of God.” Don't miss that this centurion had watched probably thousands of people die. You get the sense this was his job, to stand by the crucifixion, to stand by the cross. There's a sense in which he had watched this over and over, and yet there was something in the way Jesus died where he says, “Surely he is the son of God.” He's confessing what all disciples should confess. This Roman centurion, the outsider, the quintessential person who's distant from God, who's anti-God, and yet, when the curtain in the temple tears, it is open to everyone, even the Roman centurion. Even this Roman looks and says, “Certainly, he was the son of God.”

For the first time, we watch him confess this correctly, and for Mark, this example of true faith, to see Jesus entering into his reign through death and identifying as the Son of God, this is the climax of all that he's been trying to get us to see. Because remember, Peter rebuked Jesus when Jesus spoke of the cross. The disciples argued about sitting at his right or left. They argued about prominence when Jesus spoke of the cross. Everyone had abandoned and run from Jesus on the way to the cross, but now the centurion stands before him, seeing all that's transpired, all that has been said about Jesus. And it's here that he recognizes the very identity of Jesus as the Son of God.

And notice, don't lose the irony. It's not in his triumphalist moment. It's when Mark writes, “And Jesus breathed his last.” That is how he was identified as the Son of God. That is stunning. It is radically different from anything the world could imagine. You don't tell stories about God dying. You certainly don't celebrate them. You certainly don't worship them. See, we are a peculiar people. We worship the crucified God. And we now live in the wake of this particular moment, trying to put together all the implications of what it means that God was crucified.

This is all the rest of the New Testament trying to figure this out. It's the church trying to navigate what it means. It changes everything. It changes the way I view my money. It changes the way I view my relationships and the way I interact socially. It changes the way I view my enemies. There's a rupture here, both physically in creation and philosophically and spiritually and psychologically. The whole world transforms in this particular moment, and we're simply trying to put the pieces back together. This is discipleship, trying to figure out all the

implications of Jesus dying. What do we do with that? How do we live in light of that reality? Because if that is true, and of course we believe it is, that he's resurrected three days later, then this radically transforms everything. The very essence and character of God is revealed in this particular moment. Because, again, the crucified Jesus is the greatest revelation of the very character and essence of God.

The story now moves on in verse 42 and, in some ways, I imagine the story gets quiet at this point. [Mark 15:42-47](#)

We see a new character, Joseph, who we're just getting introduced to, and interestingly, it says he's a prominent member of the council. It's a bit debated, but scholars believe that this is potentially an allusion to the Sanhedrin. Joseph—a member of that very body that had been seeking to execute Jesus, the enemy of enemies, the outsider of outsiders, a prominent member of the council who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God—goes boldly to Pilate.

Imagine the intensity of that moment, what had all just transpired. You're going before Pilate, the one who just sentenced Jesus to be crucified. And now you're going insane. He wanted to take care of this king of the Jews. He's very much risking his life, and although he doesn't pick up a cross and follow Jesus, he certainly is going to the cross with the very reality that he may die because of the actions he's taking. At an absolute minimum, he's risking his reputation. He's risking his vocation. He is laying down his life to care for the very body of Jesus.

There's something again where we see this outsider walking in the steps of a disciple in which he is carrying and taking on the very broken body of Jesus that he recognizes was broken for him. He takes it with the care and intimacy of one who recognizes the moment, and he wraps him carefully with clothes and places him in a tomb. It says he rolled a rock in front of the tomb because he recognized the crucified God was dead and buried Jesus' lifeless body placed in a tomb. Joseph of Arimathea is acting against the very grain of a people that he was a part of—the Sanhedrin. It appears he's working against that.

There's this boldness to him as he lays Jesus down for the silence of what has been known through church history as Holy Saturday. Jesus is dead, he's buried, and he's laid in a tomb. There's a deafening silence at this moment. We don't know much about this particular Saturday, but put yourself in the position of those disciples. The leader of this movement, who they believed and had heard confessed he is the Messiah, is dead. The only ones that seem to figure it out are pretty far from the nucleus of Jesus' followers.

Jesus, in the silence of Holy Saturday, is lying there waiting, dead. What do we do with that? I wish I could tell you. For a day, Jesus lay dead. All I do know about it is that Jesus, the crucified Jesus, is the greatest revelation of God, which means it's speaking something to the fact that when Jesus suffers, God is suffering. When Jesus was humiliated, God was humiliated. When you are humiliated, God has experienced that. When we experience suffering, God has experienced that. When you are in the agony of waiting for the unknown of something like Holy Saturday, God too has experienced that agony of Holy Saturday.

God exists in this life of self-sacrificial love. John later would say that God is love, which means this particular moment, the greatest revelation of who God is, is demonstrating the love of God in its fullest form. Jesus, by suffering evil and not responding in kind, transforms evil into something good. It's stunning. It's profound. Listen to the way Jurgen Moltmann, a theologian, writes.

If we follow through the idea that the historical passion of Christ reveals the eternal passion of God, then the self-sacrifice of love is God's eternal nature...For the cross is not something that is historically fortuitous, which might not have happened. God himself is nothing other than love. Consequently, Golgotha is the inescapable revelation of his nature in a world of evil and suffering. Moltmann

The classic question is, how do we deal with the problem of suffering? The only answer you and I, as peculiar people, can give is to point to the cross. I don't know at all. I don't know the answers, but I know that Jesus did not consider himself distant, removed from that.

The very triune God experienced pain and suffering. It communicates something to us. God, in his essence, enters into a world that's riddled with evil and suffering. Therefore, if God is love, the natural consequence, Golgotha, had to happen because love when it encounters evil will suffer. That is just how love operates, and God, at his core, is that perfect expression of love. He is love. So it's in that moment, inescapably, that we see God in his most beautiful and yet broken state. At the risk of oversimplification, which certainly this whole sermon is an exercise of that, you can boil it down to this—God is with you, and God is for you. It seems so simple. I didn't surprise anyone with that. You know these words, that God is with you and God is for you. But I hope when we walk through this wake of Jesus' death, maybe it hits a little bit differently today. When you consider the reality that the crucified God is with you, that the crucified God is for you, the highest revelation of that, substituting himself for the very death that you and I deserve.

You see, the death of Jesus on the cross is the most comprehensive expression of God's fellowship with humans. Whatever pain you have experienced, God has experienced that. Suffering is not a theory for God. It is not some abstract, distant concept. Rather, suffering is an experience that God himself has walked through in a way none of us can imagine because none of us have experienced the unjust death that Jesus experienced, the unjust killing of his own son. There's a depth to this moment in which God no longer sees the suffering of his people as an abstract reality.

So, church, for those of you who are in pain, God knows your pain. For those of you who are suffering, God knows suffering. For those of you who've been rejected, God knows rejection. For those of you who are lonely, God knows loneliness. For those of you who've been humiliated,

God knows humiliation. For those of you facing the reality of death, God is with you. For those facing divorce, God is with you. For those facing cancer, God is with you. For those who stay up at night praying, pleading for a wayward child, God is with you. For those of you who've lost a job or face unending circumstances you don't know how you're going to walk through, God is with you.

And the cross proves that moment. It is the greatest revelation of who God is. He is not angry. He is not upset with you. He wants so badly to be in communion with you that he walked through the pain he never had to. God is with you, and God is for you.

It's in that Holy Saturday that the disciples wrestle with that reality because it is more profound than you, and I can try to understand. All I know is when Joseph laid the body of Jesus in that tomb, the earth grew silent, darkness crept in, and the stone was rolled in front of the tomb. May you never forget that God is with you and God is for you. And in the silence of Holy Saturday, we sit with the reality that the crucified God has breathed his last.

In some ways, it seems fitting that at funerals or in the memory of the death of a loved one, we sit in silence. There's something to that silence where we remember, but we also consider the reality and the gravity of that particular moment. I want us to experience a moment of silence. I want us to sit in this moment in which Jesus has been laid to rest, and we wait. Easter's next week. We'll get there. But right now, we wait. So again, I invite you to just sit in the moment.

There are two things that happen from the cross where Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It says he gave out one loud cry and he breathed his last. I pray we recognize the forsakeness of God that he experiences that. And if you feel forsaken by God, Jesus has felt that. I want you to know that he breathed his last for you and for me so that we recognize that God is in whatever pain and hurt that you experience. God is there with you, and he has made a way for you to be in the very presence of the Holy of Holies, to experience the very mercy seat of God's love for you.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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