

Epworth Chapel on the Green
March 29, 2013
Good Friday
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22:1-11
Hebrews 10:1-25
John 19:1-37

The painful cry of Jesus, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” as he hangs from the Cross, is difficult for us to hear. Imagine, then, what it must have been like for Jesus to have to utter it. If silence is sometimes deafening, the Divine silence that occurred as Jesus hung on the Cross must have been indescribable.

In the context of Psalm 22 which Jesus apparently quotes, I am perplexed at how God could remain silent in the face of Jesus’ excruciating pain. Perhaps you wonder about it as well. Similarly, we might also question God’s silence at points in our lives where we experience great pain and heartache.

But it is precisely in these moments when we catch a glimpse into the character of God.

As Jesus hangs on the Cross and cries out to God, it might be easy for us to conclude that because God was *silent* in that moment, God was *absent* in that moment.

This is not necessarily true. The more I read Scripture, the more I am convinced that God has a different agenda than we do. I am convinced that God is

not really interested in explaining our pain. Rather, God's way of working is to *enter into our pain with us, to share it, to take it upon himself.*

God's *silence* then does not mean God's *absence*, but rather his presence with us in ways we might not be able to fully understand, especially in the moments of great pain or heartache. It is in the midst of suffering and pain that we often discover the silent presence of God in our lives. In those moments of our deepest pain, those moments when we cry out, "God, where are You?" we discover that we are not alone.

Shortly after our son Andrew had been diagnosed with Leukemia, he became ill and was hospitalized. He grew worse, and late on a Saturday evening seizures shook his body and plunged him into an unresponsive and coma-like state. We walked alongside his bed as the doctors and nurses moved his limp body into the intensive care unit. My wife and I sat on his bed and looked at each other with blank stares on our faces.

A few hours later, the phone rang. I picked up the receiver. On the other end was a pastor, a colleague, from Joliet, Illinois. He spoke less than 10 words, and simply said: "Brook, you are not alone. You are loved." Then he hung up.

Now what this pastor was trying to tell us was that there were other *people* who were praying and supporting us. But what Connie and I discovered in those moments was that in the *silence* of that dark night -- where the only sounds were

breathing machines and beeping monitors -- *God* was strangely present with us. I resolved in that moment never to confuse God's silence with God's absence.

And here we are on the day when Jesus hung in agony on the Cross. The day when he cried out to his Father, but got no reply. A day of indescribable darkness and horror for him.

In a few minutes we will pray the solemn collects, and we will intercede for the world. When we look at our world and we see the tumult, the chaos, the pain, the suffering, the destruction -- we might easily be tempted to cry out, "God, where are You in all of this?"

Such a cry would be understandable.

But let us not confuse God's *silence* with God's *absence*. And let us be concerned not so much with asking God to explain the pain around us, but rather let us ask God for grace to see that he has entered fully into the pain around us, and is very much present, even when he appears to be absent.

For truly, we are not alone. Not on our worst day. Not on this day. Not ever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.