

SERMON FOR GOOD FRIDAY 2020

TEXT: PSALM 22: 1-5

YOU ARE NOT FORSAKEN

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? ² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. ³ Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. ⁴ In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. ⁵ To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

In the name of Jesus:

Americans have been practicing social distancing for almost three weeks. It has been necessary to do this, in some cases even to go into quarantine so as to slow the spread of COVID-19. But social distancing has come with a price, as current events have taken a toll on the mental health of Americans. According to Google, searches for loneliness have now reached the highest levels since Google has started tracking searches in 2004. Experts have emphasized social distancing as one of the essential components to reducing the spread of COVID-19. We have seen schools close, events canceled, sporting events postponed, all in an effort to limit person-to-person contact. Now to be clear, this is necessary and it is good that we are doing this. But at the same time, social distancing has exacerbated the feeling of loneliness. Former forms of escape and entertainment are no longer an option. Bars and

restaurants have closed or now offer limited curbside service. Movie theaters, shopping centers and malls have all shut down. And all of this has led to an increase in the anxiety and stress levels of Americans. Three out of four Americans are now in lockdown. I think it would be safe to say that there has never been a time when people have been so alone.

God tells us that in the Book of Genesis that He created man in order to have friendship and fellowship with Him. And God created woman to be a helper and compliment to man, saying that “It is not good for man to be alone, I will make a helper for him.” We have been created as creatures that are in need of fellowship with God and with one another.

But we feel all alone. Cut off from one another, and forsaken by God. We see people suffering on the nightly news. Hospitals overwhelmed. Unemployment sadly is still on the rise. Suffering has taken up residence in our community, as more people are infected and hospitalized, people have been laid off or furloughed from work, and people’s emotions are frayed. And social distancing continues for at least another few weeks.

The words of the Psalmist in Psalm 22 are chilling. He writes of extreme and profound loneliness. God seems completely absent. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me? Why aren’t You listening? I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. It is as if you aren’t even bothered by my suffering!”

But the Psalmist is not without hope. He remembers that God has helped His people of old in the past. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. ⁴In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. ⁵To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.” The Psalmist remembers the faithfulness of God in times past. God’s people trusted in the Lord who chose them to be His people. God is enthroned above and is worthy to be trusted, for their fathers trusted in God and God helped them in their time of need. The mercies of God are remembered by the Psalmist: God sparing His people from famine in Egypt, God freeing His people from slavery in Egypt, the Lord feeding His people in the wilderness and ultimately leading His people through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Time and time again God’s people turned to the Lord for help in

their time of need, and they were never forsaken or forgotten about, God was their ever-present Help in times of trouble.

It is not that God's people deserved this. They didn't. Their faith waned. They questioned God. Some openly rebelled. But the Lord is rich in mercy, looking down from heaven to answer their prayers, for God pities and has mercy on the sinner.

God the Father showed His mercy on a Friday we call Good almost 2000 years ago. On a mount called Calvary God sent His Son to the cross to condemn Him for the entire human race. The prophet Isaiah foresaw what God would do as he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

All of your sin, all of your iniquity has been laid on Jesus. He who knew no sin became sin for you. God the Father placed upon His Son the sins of the entire world. Your sins and mine. God the Father damned

His Son for you and me and for all people. Jesus was forsaken by the Father, He suffered the pangs of death, the torments of Hell, and He cried out “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Why? Because God sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world in Him.

Jesus poured out His soul to death, He bore your sins and mine. He was forsaken by God so that you might never be forsaken. Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus is with you; His rod and staff comfort you. He promises that He will not leave you alone. You are never alone. He sends His Spirit and His Spirit is in you in Baptism, His Spirit speaks to you in His Word, He comes to refresh you with His body and blood. God keeps His promise in Jesus. He will never leave nor forsake you so that now you can confidently say that the Lord is my Helper, I will not be afraid.

During this time of social distancing, you may be physically separated from other people, but please know that you are never alone. You have been baptized in the name of Jesus and belong to His Church. You have brothers and sisters in Christ who love you and pray for you. Most importantly, you have Jesus, who loved you with an everlasting love, suffering in His life and death so that you would be a child of God.

And you are! Continue to trust in Christ. He is merciful. He loves you still and will never hurt you. And you can be confident that because of His death on the cross nothing will ever be able to separate you from the love of God, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

Amen