

Good Friday; April 10, 2020
Matthew 27:45-50

God gives us a promise in his Word. We find it in the book of Hebrews. He tells us: **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”** They are simple words. They are clear words filled with a promise. God will never forsake you! God will never abandon you. He is there with you in the good times and the bad times. Those words are a comfort for us, especially with all the events going on around us. Everything has changed. Everything that has seemed so “normal” to us, are not normal anymore. So much of life has just stopped. It’s almost feels like that God reached out and pushed a big old pause button on world. For those families who have been touched by the COVID-19, it may even feel like God has abandoned them. Whether or not you or your family has been touched by this virus, it is easy to wonder why God is letting things happen like they are. It is easy to ask the question that Jesus asks from the cross: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

As we think about that question that is asked by Jesus, I want you to go back a couple of thousand years. I want you to think of man named Abraham. God had given Abraham a promise. He was going to have **“descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.”** (Gen. 22:17) From all those descendants the Savior of the world would come. There was problem with that promise: God hadn’t Abraham and Sarah a child. Abraham was 99 and Sarah was 89 and they didn’t even have 1 descendant. But God kept his promise a year later. When Abraham was a 100 and Sarah 90, they final had 1 descendant.

Some years pass, and then God has another test for Abraham. God asks Abraham to sacrifice his one and only son. I can’t even imagine how Abraham felt. But he goes anyway. He takes Isaac up a mountain, places his son on the altar, and is ready to sacrifice his son. But then God steps in and says: **“Stop.”** How could God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son whom he loved with all his heart?

To understand the story of Abraham, you have to look at the picture of Jesus dying on the cross. God had asked Abraham to sacrifice his one and only Son whom he loved with all his heart. But God steps in and stops Abraham. When Roman soldiers raised their hands to drive nails in the hands of God’s one and only Son, God the Father doesn’t stop them. God sacrifices his one and only Son, Jesus. Jesus cries out: **“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”** Yet, isn’t it amazing that Jesus doesn’t complain once as he is being crucified? He doesn’t say *“ouch”* once.

The only thing that he cries out on that cross are: **“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”** At that moment on the cross, the Father forsakes his Son. You see the warrior, Jesus, is facing the greatest battle that anyone has faced in the entire history of this world. It is a battle he fights alone. The Son of God fighting the Prince of Darkness, the Devil. Not only does he fight the Devil on that cross, he faces the full wrath of his heavenly Father.

At almost every major event in Jesus’ life, we see God the Father loving his Son. When Jesus is born, we see the Father sending the angels to announce his birth. When Jesus begins his ministry, we see the Father declare this was his son, whom he loved. On the mount of Transfiguration, we see the Father declaring his love for his Son. But on this mount on that first Good Friday, things are different. God the Father forsakes his Son. Why? Because he loves his Son and loves us. There Jesus is carrying out his mission. All the planning and directing of God boils down to this one moment so that you and I can enjoy heaven forever.

What’s the best part of heaven? We get to be with God forever. That barrier of sin has been removed. This broken world with all its viruses will be restored. All the pain and suffering and dying is gone. God promises us that he will never forsake us ever. What the worst part of hell? God will forsake people there forever.

Over the last month, we have added some new words into our vocabulary. Who had ever heard of the phrase: *Social Distancing*? We’ve all experienced that in some form or another. Grandparents can’t be with their grandchildren. Spouses may be separated from each other as they have gone into the hospital. Sons and daughters need to wave to each other through the glass of the windows. Many of us have learned to use programs such as Meets, or hangouts, skype, facetime, and messenger. Why? So, we can see each other. Somehow, it feels less like being abandoned or forsaken if we can see each other’s face and hear voices. We know that this time will pass. That is only a fraction of time compared to being quarantined from God forever.

That’s why Jesus is hanging on that cross. He is being abandoned so that we will never be abandoned by our God. God the Father abandoned his Son of the cross that first Good Friday. There on that cross, the Father spoke. The world went dark that day as the greatest battle this world had ever seen was fought. But then the light came out again. The curtain in the temple was torn in two. It was perhaps the Father’s way of saying to this world that he accepted the payment of sin as Jesus died. **“It is Finished.”** No more sacrifices. Access to God was now open to all. Not even the grave can keep its hold on us. We have been set free. That’s what the death of Jesus brings to this world.

After the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, a vast number of mourners filed past his casket when his body was lying in state, and in that large throng of people was an elderly black woman with her little 4-year old grandson, who was tightly clutching Grandma's hand. When they came up to the coffin of Abraham Lincoln, this aged lady stood motionless for a long time as she gazed on the lifeless body of the slain President, and she had profuse tears streaming down her cheeks. After a while, she stooped down and lifted the little boy so that he too could see the body of their dead leader. "Little one," she said to the boy, wiping tears from her eyes, "take a long, long look at that man. Don't you ever forget him," she said. "He's the one who ended your slavery. He's the one who set you free!"

On this Good Friday, take a long look at Jesus on the cross. He is the one who has set us free. **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,”** are the words of our God. That’s the answer to Jesus’ question, **“My God, My God, why have you forsake me?”** The answer: NEVER. Amen.