

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" From the cross, Jesus cries out "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?"

The Greek word translated to *cried* suggests that Jesus screamed this question. He did not mumble these words. It was not a phrase whispered from under his breath. Nor was this some contemplative, rhetorical question. Beaten, stripped down, now hanging from the cross with no disciples in sight, Jesus screamed from the depths deeper than physical pain. "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" Abandoned by his very own being.

Scholars point to Psalm 22 which opens with the very same words Jesus shouted from the cross. These scholars make sense of Jesus' question by directing our attention to the sacred text. Some argue Jesus was quoting the opening to Psalm 22 because he knew the Psalm well, and knew how it ended. The Psalm begins with despair, but it ends with trust and praise. This quoting of Scripture was in essence an act of faith. Perhaps Jesus was not as broken as this opening verse leads us to believe. Maybe Jesus chose this particular verse because He knew the Psalm ended well. He chose this verse because what he was eventually going to say was "I trust you, my God."

Frankly, I don't buy these scholars' argument – at least not entirely. If Jesus was attempting to show his faith-filled trust why not scream out the previous psalm, "In your strength the king rejoices, O Lord?" Or why not pull from the next Psalm "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want?" Certainly, Jesus was using the opening to Psalm 22, but that is not the point. Jesus prayed these very words because they were his reality. For this day, the deep sense of abandonment was his

only company. The reality was he felt abandoned. Jesus was abandoned on this Good Friday.

In his commentary Dale Bruner tackles this text at length. In his opening he writes that in Jesus' question to God we find "*the Gospel at its deepest.*" Bruner continues, "*it reveals better than any other sentence in the Gospel who Jesus is and what he does.*" Jesus could have ended his life much more triumphantly with a noble exclamation: "God is Love," "Love one another," "Death will be conquered." But instead, Jesus' last words end with a question; a seemingly weak question. And therein lies the point to this passage: Jesus came not only to provide answer, He also came asking *our* questions. Questions we may fear asking: My God, My God, where are you?

Rarely do we scream out the question like Jesus', for we are more pious than he. Yet if not on the tip of our tongue this question lies in the depth of our heart. In the rare occasion we allow this question to surface, we ask for ourselves and, on behalf of others. For some, perhaps the deep loneliness of being abandoned by family felt as if God abandoned as well. Or when the partner who promised 'til death do us part' up and left, or perhaps when death actually separated two who loved so deeply. Or in the midst of a diagnosis. Or maybe abandonment accompanied the job loss, or the financial struggles. Or the loss of a friend group. My God, My God, why have you abandoned the people of Ukraine, who worry less about food and shelter and more about surviving this day, this hour. Why abandon our black brothers to a jail cell, to either an illegal or a legal bullet? Why abandon those who ask only for acceptance? Those stuck on the other side of a fabricated border? Why abandon those who teeter upon the margins of an unjust society? Lord, why have you forsaken?

No, the point is not that Jesus is allowing scripture to speak for him. The point is that Jesus, the Word of God, is speaking for us, as the voice of humanity. He asks our questions. In his brokenness, isolated on a cross, completely abandoned, he chooses not to turn from God but instead to cry out to God in prayer. Perhaps Christ's troubling question from the cross is His greatest teaching on faith: It is leaning on faith even in those moments God's presence is not felt. It is turning toward God when God cannot be experienced. It is faith carrying prayer carrying faith. From the cross, turning to God in his darkest moment, Jesus continues to show us his way.