

## Alone

Psalm 22:1-3

We've spent a lot of the last year alone. The lockdowns and closings of schools and workplaces isolated us from one another. Those who were exposed to the virus were supposed to quarantine for 14 days to see if they became symptomatic or tested positive, and then isolate themselves from even those in their household if they did test positive. Those who were hospitalized with the virus suffered in isolation, as anyone who came into their room had to be covered with PPE in order to protect themselves. Many died alone, with only video calls for their loved ones to say goodbye. Others died alone as the isolation went on, as events were canceled, and it seemed like nothing would be normal again. Nursing homes were closed to outside visitors, and some residents were even restricted to their rooms to protect them from the virus.

The pandemic and the response to it aren't the only things that have isolated us. Talking heads on TV and social media continue to separate us further from each other, unable to find common ground with those we disagree with. Pick any issue, and those on the extremes are the loudest. Sides grow further and further apart. Those divisions spill offline, separating family and friends in real life.

As we reflect on Good Friday, we see Jesus endure isolation. He is alone when he goes off to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, and his disciples cannot stay awake with him. He goes off by himself to pray, to ask if the cup may be taken from him, but follows His Father's will anyway.

Jesus is alone because of betrayal. One of his twelve closest followers betrays him for 30 pieces of silver. Jesus knows it is coming. But it

doesn't make it any easier. He is betrayed by a kiss, a sign of closeness turned into a sign of betrayal. Despite the crowd that comes to arrest him, Jesus is alone.

Jesus is alone because his disciples run away. One tries to fight back, abandoning Jesus' teachings to cut off the ear of one of the high priests' servants. They scatter and flee, leaving Jesus alone at the time of his greatest need.

Jesus is alone when the naked young man runs away. One of the unique parts of Mark's Gospel is the inclusion of a young man who runs away naked after the soldiers grab him by the robe. Tradition tells us this could be Mark himself. Even those who followed Jesus at a distance run away, abandoning him.

Jesus is alone when he is on trial. He has no friendly witnesses, only those who are lying and trying to come up with a reason he should be condemned. He has no advocate, no lawyer, no one to argue for him or represent him. Jesus is alone and silent before those judging him.

Jesus is alone before the power of the crowd. Pilate seems to be slightly sympathetic, but the crowd is against him, and against Jesus. The crowd cheering Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on a donkey a few short days ago is gone. Jesus finds no support, no sympathy in this crowd. Jesus is alone.

Jesus is alone on the cross. Yes, there are men on his right and his left. Thieves, robbers, insurrectionists, those who tried to defy the power of Rome. Yes, there are the crowds passing by and looking at the spectacle. Yet they are distant. They are mostly hostile.

Jesus is alone on the cross. He even cries out with the opening verse of Psalm 22, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus is as alone as he ever was. Jesus is as alone as he could ever be.

Jesus was alone because we made him alone. Sin’s power is to separate and divide, alienate and isolate. And all of the sin of the world was on Jesus on the cross. And so Jesus was isolated and alone, separated and alienated from everyone and everything.

Jesus was alone on Good Friday so we would not have to be. Jesus endured the isolation of sin so we wouldn’t have to do so. Jesus endured the separation caused by sin so we wouldn’t have to. Because of his sacrifice on the cross, we have been brought close to God. The power of sin is ended, the power of death is defeated.

That is the very reason that Jesus was forsaken by His Father – so we would not have to be.

The wages of sin is death, but Jesus died in your place.

He was numbered with the transgressors so that you could be counted with the saints.

He was found guilty even though he was innocent so that you might be found innocent even though you are guilty.

He was stripped of His clothes so that you might be clothed in His righteousness.

He was despised and rejected so that you might be accepted into God’s holy family.

He was abandoned so that you might be adopted.

As Isaiah reminds us, He was pierced for your transgressions. He was crushed for your iniquities. His punishment brought you peace. And by His wounds you are healed.

He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted, so that you could be redeemed, restored, and acquitted.

After meditating long upon this fourth word of Jesus from the cross, Martin Luther exclaimed: “God was forsaken by God! Who can understand it?” Though we cannot begin to understand how alone Jesus felt on the cross, we can glimpse its impact.

One of the most common commands in the Bible is the command to fear not. It almost always is accompanied by the promise of God’s presence. Since we know how the story ends, we can look ahead to Easter and beyond, where Jesus brings his followers back together. His promise to not leave them alone is fulfilled.

As vaccinations continue to be distributed and the pandemic gets closer to ending, we look forward to being able to safely be with others and know we’re not alone. We look for ways to bridge the partisan divides. We look for ways to reach out to those who are isolated and alone.

We hear again today the story of Jesus’ arrest, trial, beating and crucifixion. When we hear those words, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” we wonder how. But we don’t wonder why. We know why Jesus did it. So you’ll never have to say those words. He was forsaken so you would be forgiven. Jesus was alone on the cross so we wouldn’t be. What a wonderful promise.

Pastor David Beagley  
Memorial Lutheran Church, Ames, IA  
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