**The Day Without Bread**

A sermon for Good Friday

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St. Paul’s Episcopal Church

Bedford Massachusetts

We say it all the time – some of us every day -- many of us since our youth. It comes from the first prayer we were taught. “Give us this day our daily bread.” A simple, pure, humble request, which God always meets. Except for today. Today is the day without bread.

Many people choose to fast on Good Friday, to help us remember that today is the day without bread. I tried to fast one year on Good Friday. I literally could not stand it. I made it until about 11am before I had to sit, and eat. Our bodies are so used to having our daily bread: whether it is wheat or rye or pita or naan…at least, mine is. I suspect many of yours may be, too. Every day we can have bread and we are filled. You and I. Every day. We are so fortunate, and most days, also so grateful…so grateful to have our daily bread to fill our bodies.

And, so too, our souls. Each time we are in this room together, we look to the Holy Table for the bread of life. For the true bread which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. But today, we find it empty. Today there is no bread.

One version of the Lord’s Prayer ask God: “With the bread that we need for today, feed us.” And today, the answer is no. Today there is no Eucharist to nourish us. We cannot enact the ritual that reminds us of God’s salvation and redemption. We cannot enact the ritual that reminds us who we are: people of love and compassion and justice and hope.

And we find this intolerable. It is too hard for our souls, just as fasting is too hard for our bodies. So we will have bread today...sort of. We will not celebrate. We will have not our *daily* bread. We will not kneel before the bread that we have watched become alive with Christ’s presence on this altar. Because today, Christ is not alive. We will have day-old bread. Yesterday’s bread. We will make do with what remains. We pray that Christ’s presence is still there. That we are not abandoned. That we are not forsaken.

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” These are one of Jesus’ famous seven last words from the Cross. And perhaps, the most familiar -- though we do not hear them in John’s passion that we read tonight, nor in Luke’s that we heard on Sunday.

They are familiar because they are not just Jesus’ words. They are our words, too. Today, Jesus reaches the pinnacle of his humanity – sharing in what is perhaps the most profoundly human experience: to feel abandoned by God. You know about this feeling, I suspect. We don’t really need liturgy to teach us that. You know how it feels to cry out to God and wonder if she is listening…or he…or it. In the hospital room. In the depths of a depression. In the loneliness of a loveless marriage. In the experience of abuse and neglect. In the betrayal of a friend. In the starvation of a stranger. We know this cry. And so we hear this word of Jesus from the Cross, and it is…too familiar. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

It is familiar, and yet in *Jesus’* mouth it is also very different. It is awkward, clumsy. In his voice, it seems to not make sense. After all, Jesus is not just fully human, not just an innocent victim, Jesus is also God. So to whom is he crying?

I suspect it is not to the same God that we cry out to when we feel forsaken. For it is not to a distant uncaring God, out in the vastness of time and space. It is not to the God with the long beard and the stern brow who abandons Jesus as a kind of judgement, as a punishment for Adam’s sin…or yours; or mine. No. That is not real. That is our own projection, our own rationalization of the ambivalence we may have about our own goodness. Perhaps some ambivalence about our own goodness is warranted – have you seen the news, ever – but the conception of a vindictive, filicidal God most certainly is not.

No. The God to whom Jesus cries lives not “way out there” but right here, on the Cross, within him. Literally in his body. God has not left Jesus in his moment of deepest pain. And Jesus has not left God. Even at the hour of his death. He is crying to the God within him. He is crying out to the ultimate life force of compassion and forgiveness and generosity within him -- saying Why, Why has the pursuit of goodness led me to this? Why is it that love provokes hate, gentleness violence, and compassion cruelty. Why must this be the way?

If God has abandoned Jesus on the Cross, it is not the God-ness within him, but rather, I’m afraid, it is the God-ness within us. The Goodness within humanity turned its back on Jesus and forsook him in his hour of need. The absent God is the God within the thoughtless soldiers, within the bloodthirsty crowd, within the self-protective religious authorities and the morally bankrupt wannabe dictators, within the frightened followers and cowardly disciples. That is the God who has fled. It is the God-ness, the Good-ness, the Godness/Goodness in each human person that has turned away from Jesus on the Cross. That has failed to confront evil. Failed to support the good. And ultimately failed to suffer alongside the innocent.

It is the failure of our human goodness our human godness that brings Jesus into an experience of abandonment that only a human being can know: that dark night unfolding in the brightness of the noon-day sun. It was all happening right out there in the open. Everyone could see, and no one stood up for the True Goodness, the True Godness in our midst. Because we were silent, God was silent.

And so today is our day without bread. Today is the day when we, too, experience being forsaken by God – being without God’s companionship, without God’s real presence among us. And it is intolerable. Even our imitation meal, always feels so empty. It is a bit like eating leftovers…trying to subsist on the memory of a meal that we enjoyed earlier, but that now feels, well…a little dry, and hardly the sustenance that it was. Today we leave the table and we are still hungry.

And perhaps that’s the point. Perhaps that is as it should be. Maybe we should leave the table hungry today -- like so many of our sisters and brothers do every day. Maybe if we are more hungry each day for the true bread, for what really will feed the Goodness/Godness within us, we will seek it out and find it. And our Godness, our goodness, will be nourished and will grow, empowering us to not be silent when the next Cross appears before us, or our brother, or our sister. We should be hungry for the strength to confront evil, to support the good, to suffer alongside the innocent victims among us. Because when we hear our sisters and brothers cry aloud, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” we can no longer deny, that they are crying out to no God except the one who lives deep within each of us. AMEN.