

Abandonment

'But I cry to you for help, O Lord; in the morning my prayer comes before you.
Why, O Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?
I have suffered your terrors and am in despair. Your wrath has swept over me;
Your terrors have destroyed me. All day long they surround me like a flood;
They have completely engulfed me.
You have taken my companions from me; the darkness is my closest friend.'
PS 88:13-18

Jesus' rejection, abuse, and murder at the hands of men were not His greatest sorrow. It was His Father's abandonment of Him on the cross.

Jesus expected the scourge of political and religious foes. The desertion of His disciples, however painful, was bearable.

Through it all, He held fast to His steadfast consolation--the Father who promised to never forsake Him. One cannot imagine His dismay when the Father abandoned Him to the darkness of sin.

He was willing, yet not prepared for the scourge and judgment of sin to fall upon Him. He knew the truth: what is holy cannot commune with what is foul. Jesus realized that the evil in humanity demanded a sacrifice. The price had to be paid. And He knew that whatever bears that sin becomes a horrible, stinking cancer that the Father cannot look upon.

Nothing can be further from the Father than that which is accursed!

That's why Jesus' lamented in the garden: 'Father, all things are possible—remove this cup!' The cup was the wrath and judgment of sin that Jesus agreed to drink.

Perhaps a part of Him still held out for a slightly less painful way to bear sin, one that would still include fellowship with the Father.

Listen to this prayer of David, a prophecy of Christ's lament on the cross:

"All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads;
'He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him.
Let the Father deliver him, since he delights in him.'
Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast...
From my mother's womb you have been my God.
Do not be far from me, for trouble is near

And there is no one to help.” (PS 22:7-11)

Jesus prayer was not answered. He was not granted a cup that included fellowship with the Father. He had never been cut off from Him! Overwhelmed by the scourge of sin, Jesus was not ready for utter separation from the Father.

Accursed, veiled by the darkness of sin, the Son could no longer behold His Father. The One Voice, His One Hope, His Steadfast Source vanished, and Jesus cried out into the void: ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?’ (Matt. 27:46)

The weight of assuming sin’s darkness cost the Son His communion with the Father. Having abandoned Himself to the Father’s will, the Son found Himself abandoned. This was God’s supreme suffering. Not the mocking abuse, the smashing of the mirror, but the veil of sin separating Father and Son. The Son lamented His ‘fatherlessness’, the Father His ‘sonlessness’.

The pathos of the cross involved at core the grief of a parent releasing a child unto death. For the Son, a descent into complete darkness. And for the father, the horror of knowing His Son would be consumed by that darkness, without consolation.

Simone Weill conveyed with unparalleled artistry the distance sin imposed upon Father and Son: “So that love may be as great as possible, the distance must be as great as possible. This infinite distance between God and God [Father and Son], this supreme tearing apart, this agony beyond all others, this marvel of love, this is crucifixion...

This tearing apart, over which supreme love places the bond of supreme union, echoes perpetually across the universe, like two notes, separate yet melding into one, like pure and heartrending harmony. This is the Word of God. The whole creation is nothing but its vibration. When human music in its greatest purity pierces our soul, this is what we hear through it...”

Our twice-born lives, still subject to the ‘sickness-of-sin’, may at times tempt us to believe that we have been abandoned to the separation sin demands, that the curse still holds sway over the powerful blessing of the Father’s love.

The cross invites us this day to hear the music of mercy once more. We need to behold the distance once more that both Father and Son endured to bring us back. ‘For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion, I will bring you back... (Is. 55: 7)

Jurgen Moltmann writes: ‘When we recognize our helplessness and can do nothing more, the forsaken Christ gives us a share in His passion. Our struggle against sin and despair need not separate us from Him, but rather can draw us into deeper communion with Him. We join in His

death cry and await resurrection.'

Today we do not focus on what we can do. We are all reduced to the same impotence. Like Peter, all we can do is behold the Lamb who has turned toward us.

Behold our faithful mirror, the One who manifests unfailing love to us, now smashed. Behold the true Image of God in humanity twisted and torn, abandoned by its Maker. Behold the agony of Love wrenched from Love. Behold our pretense and cowardice; behold the only Truth more powerful than our sin. Behold the crushing that cleanses, the fracturing that heals, the dying that makes all things new.

Today Father and Son do the terrible work that gives life to the world.

Beneath Thy Cross
Christina Rossetti

Am I a stone, and not a sheep,
That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy cross,
To number drop by drop Thy blood's slow loss,
And yet not weep?

Not so those women loved
Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee;
Not so fallen Peter weeping bitterly;
Not so the thief was moved;

Not so the Sun and Moon
Which hid their face in a starless sky
A horror of great darkness at broad noon—
I, only I.

Yet give not o'er,
But seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the flock;
Greater than Moses, turn and look once more
And smite a rock.

'As You have shown us mercy, O God, in the desert places of our lives, would You show mercy to the beleaguered state of marriage in the USA? As the Perry vs. Schw. case wends its way to the National Supreme Court, prepare for Yourself a victory. We shall render to Caesar what is Caesar's but we shall prayerfully fight for what is Yours, O God. Prepare the hearts of each justice, especially Justice Anthony Kennedy, to uphold marriage according to Your merciful design.

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Remember mercy, O God.'