

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

April 18, 2014 – Good Friday/God's Friday

The Cost of the Public Ministry

**Ps 22 and Luke 23:44-46
(230, 233, 242, 231)**

As I continue to make sense of my life,
I have discovered that I have a great fear of abandonment.

I'm terrified of being alone,
of being left,
of being disregarded and discarded,
of being deserted,
of being forsaken,
of being cast out.

I suspect, at some level, that's true for all of us.
We might not want to admit it.
We might not even see it,
especially in this culture of ours
that prizes a distorted individualism so highly.

But deep down, we all fear being abandoned.

That's the theme that has spoken to me most powerfully
during this Lenten season this year.
It's a theme that culminates in Good Friday,
or as some call it, from the German,
God's Friday.

This is a day in which God feels abandoned.
It's a day in which God's followers feel abandoned.
It's a day when we are all
confronted with our own feelings of abandonment.

I've been pondering three kinds of abandonment this week –
abandonment by God, by others, and by our best selves.

Psalm 22 is the Scripture passage Jesus goes to
to express his human sense of abandonment by God:

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me,
from the words of my groaning.
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
(Ps 22:1-2)*

The Psalmist, with whom Jesus identifies so deeply,
feels not only abandoned by God,
but scorned by the derision of those who mock his/her faith.
There was a lot of that kind of scorn and rejection
through the course of Holy Week
as Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tried, abused, and dragged to the cross.

During that week, those human beings who had been closest to him
had grown increasingly fearful.
The one who had seemingly been the closest, Peter,
had actually denied knowing Jesus three times.
Most of the others had disappeared into upper rooms in the city,
hiding away from the angry rejection of their rabbi.
Only a few of the women, along with John,
gathered at the foot of the cross.

There's an interesting aspect to Peter's perspective and behaviour
that I had not noticed before.
During the public ministry,
he appears as the strongest of the proponents of Jesus' cause.
He is the most vocal in declaring Jesus as the Christ,
the Messiah sent by God for the redemption of the world.
He is the rock – *Petros* – upon which Jesus' work will continue.

Yet here he is during the worst week of Jesus' life
denying him in fear, dreading any connection with this person
the authorities see as a condemned rebel who needs to be executed.
In a very real sense, Peter has been abandoned
by his best self, by the self that God created him to be,
by the self who was created to be a blessing in friendship with God.

So, we are encountered this morning
by what appear to be three kinds of abandonment –
abandonment by our God,
abandonment by our closest friends,
and abandonment by our best self.

In that state of apparent abandonment,
fear sets in and takes over our lives.
We close down, shrink and shrivel,
become paranoid and paralyzed.

But there is an important truth to emphasize
in this pondering of the terror of feeling abandoned.

It's a feeling, not a reality.
Oh, it's a real feeling.
It has great power over us at times.

But it is not the real reality in which we live.
God never abandons us.
We are always surrounded by others,
many of whom think kindly of us.
And we are always accompanied by our best selves,
the selves God is constantly nurturing
to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Even on the cross, after expressing his lamentation from Ps 22,
Jesus utters the faith-filled words of our text –
“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

As we have noted, not all of the disciples flee in fear.

Even those who do, huddle together in their disappointment and despair.

And the best selves of those early disciples
emerge with courage and creativity
in the days following the crucifixion.

Abandonment is a perception, a feeling, a distorted way of seeing things.
It feels real.

It takes over our understanding of how things are.
Jesus understands that because he has experienced its full impact.

But he did not stay stuck there.
His faith opened him up to what is really real,
to the presence of God, of family and friends,
of the true blessing God had created him to be.

Through the agony and awe of the cross,
abandonment becomes acceptance and appreciation.