

Oregon City United Methodist Church
18955 S. South End Road
Oregon City, OR 97045

Rev. Michael Benischek
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March 22, 2020

Series: N/A

Sermon: FORSAKEN (This is a reworking of a sermon preached years ago)

Psalm 22:1-11

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises. In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. "He trusts in the Lord," they say, "let the Lord rescue him. Let him 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 birth I was cast on you; 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.

Sermon

We learned back in English class many years ago the five W questions. Who, What, When, Where, Why. And the occasional "How", which I don't think really counts. With school being out for the next six weeks, I'll have to give these lessons to my children. The five W questions are designed to gather information, facts and figures. These are the sorts of things we learn in history class. Who? A simple fact. What? What transpired - a simple fact. When - At what time did the event take place? Where? In what location did such and such do such and such at such and such time and this such and such place. A lot of suches. And in History class, I ruled at knowing who, what, when and where. Simple facts that I could commit to memory. Civil War, 1861 to 1865. First American in space? John Glen. Magna Carta: 1215. My hometown, Malcolm, named after the guy who started the town back in the 1880's. But he disappeared from history - not buried in the town's cemetery, and all record of him dropped off. It's been a Nerdy obsession of mine, whatever happened to the guy? Turns out, he moved out of town and came out west, and died a miner in Washington in 1911. Mystery solved. I like learning facts and digging into puzzles from the past. Who, what, when, and where. But the one question that was the toughest to examine and study was the dreaded why. The question of why is not a simple factoid question. You can answer the other ones with a one word answer. Take this sentence, for example: In May of 1843, a majority of European Americans voted to form the Oregon provisional government at Champmoeg. Who, white settlers, Where, Champmoeg, When, 1843. Why? Ahhhhhh....that's a little more tricky. And you can go into a lot of detail about how it all came about. Fact is, they came together to figure out a bounty system for cougars, wolves and bears that could hurt livestock and settlers. They came together to discuss animal control, and they came away with a Government. There were also more settlers coming into the area and they needed a way to protect their land claims - but it was the animal question that brought them together. Why is much more difficult to answer. Education is built on who, what, when, where. Wisdom is built on why. Why did Oswald kill Kennedy? Why did the laundry come out pink. Who what when where are looking for simple answers, but why is a complex question that implies a difference in understanding. Stephanie asks me why my socks are on the floor. I respond "because gravity doesn't allow them to float in the air". Not the smartest answer. We have a different understanding as to the proper location of socks, and she want to know why - to discover my line of thinking, or lack of thinking. Knowing the cause gives you more power in understanding and comprehending. A while back

needed a cell phone. So I went to the phone store, and signed up for a phone. They said there was a \$35 activation fee. I asked why? And they said to activate my phone. And I said, what does it entail? They said to program their computer to understand my phone. And I asked, why does it cost \$35? Does it take an hour of someone's time? Is there hardware that they have to install? After much hesitation, she replied, "Actually, we just type your number into our computer." I asked her if I could type it in and not pay the \$35. They waived the activation fee. Always ask why.

Our scripture this morning is a plea for understanding. The writer of this Psalm is suffering. He is in danger. He knows from what. He knows where. He knows who. He knows when. But he does not know why, and that is the most agonizing question they want answered. My God, My God, WHY have you forsaken me? WHY are you so far from helping me? That is the question of the day. Why? The question of Why has been the focal point of most of the sciences and philosophies and theologies in human history. One of the first sciences was the study of astronomy. Why does the sun come up everyday in the east and set in the west. Why do the stars move from one section of the sky to another in a very predictable pattern? What about the stars that seem to wander across the sky in direct opposition to the rest of the stars? The Greeks called those stars "Wanderers", or in English, planets. And they answered the why questions with theological answers. They are gods. Mercury, Venus, Mars, Neptune. All of the other sciences seek to answer why as well. Why do medications work, why does the human body work the way it does, why does a car hydroplane, etc. Philosophy also tries to answer the age old questions of why. Why were we put here? Why do we believe in things like justice, beauty, love, politics, culture, sport, and the list goes on. And theologies try and answer the questions of why. Almost every religion has an answer to Why. Why were we put here in the first place. Why is their evil? Why is their suffering? If God is good, why is their bad? Our psalmist wants to know: Why? God where are you? Why have you abandoned me? Forsaken is not a good place to be! In Old English, forsaken meant to oppose or to give up on, to abandon. You can forsake someone. You can forsake an idea or plan. You can feel forsaken when everyone opposes you. God, if you are not on my side, whose side are you on? I cry, but you do not answer. I call out, but I hear nothing. My enemies say to me, cry out to God, let him rescue you - but you do not listen. It is no surprise that Jesus quotes Psalm 22 in his last few breaths on the cross. My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Abandoned. Indeed, Psalm 22 is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. Can you believe it? Putting forth the words that feel like raw emotion. But intermixed with the anguish of the psalmist, we hear traces of hope and encouragement. Yet, you are holy, our ancestors cried out and you listened. The Psalmist believes that God has left him, but yet he continues to call out to God as if God had never left. Playing it safe, I suppose. There are days that we feel like the Psalmist. I am poured out like water. My bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, my mouth is dried up, and I lay in the dust of death. Maybe we're not that bad, but we feel like we're close. We feel forsaken and we want to ask WHY?

This is Psalm 22. It asks those questions, Why God, why? What is your idea, where is your master plan? I don't understand. I cannot think what you're thinking and I don't comprehend what you're doing. Why? Psalm 22 asks the questions of the human heart that only God can answer. And why did Jesus quote it on the Cross? Isn't he part God? Isn't he supposed to be in on how this was supposed to go down? Well, he's also fully human. And he's also at the lowest point of his life. He's dying. It's a new experience for him. Especially if you're also fully God. He feels separated. Not connected. I know he's quoting Psalm 22, but here's another little fact about it: He calls God, God. "Big deal", I hear you say. It is a big deal. Did you know that no where else in the Gospels does Jesus ever call God, God? He never says, "This is what God says", or "I'll talk to God for a while." Never says that. At least not out of the blue. He always refers to God as Father. Every time. There are a few times he uses the name God, but always has either, Son or Father in the sentence. Like this quote, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. He used the name God there, but Son gets thrown in very quickly. Same in John 20 after the resurrection where he tells Mary, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Again, he uses the name God, but cementing the

relationship within the sentence with Father. So this is the only time, hanging on the cross, that Jesus, feeling totally separated from God, forsaken by God, calls out using God's name as separate from himself, without that relationship reminder. And if Jesus can feel forsaken, what chance is there for us?

And I'm wondering, if Psalm 22 is the question - Why, God, Why? I wonder if Psalm 23 is the answer, or at least a hint to God's response? Psalm 23 is probably the most widely known Psalm. And for me, I find it encouraging to have Psalm 23 answer those questions of why in Psalm 22. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me besides still waters, He restores my soul. That is totally the opposite of forsaken. God is with us, shepherding us. Blessing us with the things we need. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall not be afraid, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. And the psalm ends, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all of the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Ultimately, we are to be with God, in God's house, forever. Just the extreme opposite of being forsaken. Not abandoned, but brought into relationship. Why did God make us? I think the simple answer is so that we could be with Him. It wasn't that he was lonely, bored, needed a hobby, but God truly wants a relationship with us. As a parent, why did we want to have a child? Was it because we were lonely? No. Was it because we wanted a hobby? Is it because I wanted to live in the land of diapers and car seats. Not a chance. But it's an extension of our love. With kids, there's new possibilities of new relationships, new beginnings, of the stories to be, of the memories that shall come. And one of God's promises to us, is that when we do go through bad times, we shall never be forsaken or left alone. When the storms of life assail, we can still smile and know that we are loved and cared for. My God, My God why have you forsaken me? The answer: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us, all the days of our life, and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Why? For God so loved the world, that's why. And the family of God said, AMEN.

Online Sermon

We learned back in English class many years ago the five W questions. Who, What, When, Where, Why. And the occasional "How", which I don't think really counts. With school being out for the next five weeks, I'll have to teach my kids these lessons. The five W questions are designed to gather information, facts and figures. These are the sorts of things we learn in history class. Who? A simple fact. What? What transpired - a simple fact. When - At what time did the event take place? Where? In what location did such and such do such and such at such and such time and this such and such place. A lot of suches. And in History class, I ruled at knowing who, what, when and where. Simple facts that I could commit to memory. Civil War, 1861 to 1865. First American in space? John Glen. Magna Carta: 1215. My hometown, Malcolm, named after the guy who started the town back in the 1880's. But he disappeared from history - not buried in the town's cemetery, and all record of him dropped off. It's been a Nerdy obsession of mine, whatever happened to the guy? Turns out, he moved out of town and came out west, and died a miner in Washington in 1911. Mystery solved. I like learning facts and digging into puzzles from the past. Who, what, when, and where. But the one question that was the toughest to examine and study was the dreaded why. The question of why is not a simple factoid question. You can answer the other ones with a one word answer. Why is much more difficult to answer. Education is built on who, what, when, where. Wisdom is built on why. Why did Oswald kill Kennedy? Why did the laundry come out pink. Who what when where are looking for simple answers, but why is a complex question that implies a difference in understanding. Stephanie asks me why my socks are on the floor. I respond "because gravity doesn't allow them to float in the air". Not the smartest answer. We have a different understanding as to the proper location of socks, and she wants to know why - to discover my line of thinking, or lack of thinking.

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