"Eloi, Eloi!" -- Mark 15:33-34"

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho
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Wednesday Vespers
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?
Why art Thou so far from helping Me,
from the words of My groaning?" Psalm 22:1

Dear Baptized,

Shortly before he died, Francis Voltaire, the French unbeliever and writer, is reported to have said the following words to his physician, "I am abandoned by God and man! I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months! life. Then I shall go to hell and you will go with me. O Christ! O Jesus Christ!" That is an awful death - to take our Lord's Name in vain as the Angel of death does not find the sin-atoning Blood of the Lamb applied to the doorposts of one's soul - to be facing the forever reward of unbelief as the darkness of Divine separation is realized in the last moments of time.

To ponder such a death and realize that it is an eternal death is overwhelming, frightening, staggering and utterly beyond comprehension. Indeed, it is a thought never intended for man's mind to know when "the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of Life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). God's original intention was for life, not death. If asked to imagine death multiplied ten billion times - in other words, magnified by the number of people who ever have, who are and who ever will live - well, let's face it, neither words in all the languages of mankind nor the cumulative thoughts in the mind of humanity are able to express the first syllable or think even an inkling of what this means. Such a task must be left to God Incarnate both to know such a death and to speak concerning it.

Therefore, behold Jesus and listen to Him. He spoke from the cross as He was dying this mass death and suffering the hell of humanity. The Holy Spirit, via the hand of St. Mark the Evangelist, reveals to us the very words of Jesus the Christ at three o'clock in the sunless afternoon of that first Good Friday when the infleshed Son of God was abandoned by God the Father.

Mark 15:33-34 - "And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'"

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God and our Redeemer.

Beloved of God, these deaths are very different. Upon the hearing of the words we might think that the final moments of the unbeliever and the last minutes of Jesus on the cross are the same. The infidel shouts, "I am abandoned by God and man!" Jesus cries out, "My God, My God, why hast

Thou forsaken Me?" However, these deaths are very different.

First, as already mentioned, the Savior's death is infinitely greater than the death of the unbeliever, for the infidel died the death he has deserved - Jesus has died the wretched deaths of all which He did not deserve. Jesus has died the wretched death of all. The unbeliever dies the death that has been taken from him and which he has taken back from Christ, for Jesus has taken the deaths of all, which were not His, in order that no one might have to die the death that each deserves.

Second, the unbeliever's death is insufficient and imperfect. The faithless one has nothing except a litany of self-proclaimed good works to throw into the Divine breech as the anemic attempt to staunch God's holy, perfect wrath is made. Such an initial volley is instantly annihilated with the declaration that such faithless, imperfect works are but filthy rags to the LORD as the fulfilling of the Law is accomplished neither by the Christian nor the non-Christian. In contrast, Jesus' perfect death is substitutionary, sin-atoning and sufficient. His Life is the active fulfillment of the Law and His Death is the impeccable Sacrifice of the Incarnate Son of God Who "humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

Third, the death of the unbeliever and the death of Jesus are different in another way. The faithless one denies the LORD, continues to leave God, discovers that God remains distant as the man desires and then maintains, when faced with the yawning mouth of hell, "I am abandoned by God." Sir Francis Newport was tormented on his deathbed and confessed to an unbelieving companion:

"That there is a God I know, because I continually feel the effects of His wrath. ... O that I was to lie upon the fire that never is quenched a thousand years, to purchase the favor of God, and be reunited to Him again! But it is a fruitless wish. ... I have despised my Maker, and denied my Redeemer. I have joined myself to the atheist and profane, and continued this course under many convictions, till my iniquity was ripe for vengeance, and the just judgment of God overtook me when my security was the greatest and the checks of my conscience were the least."

Contrast this hopeless death with Jesus the Christ Who is One with the Father, Who prays to Him, even petitioning Him from the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Jesus became the Divine Scapegoat driven into the wilderness and when the unblemished Lamb is sacrificed on the altar of the cross, the Father does abandon His Son - God the Father does forsake Jesus. In spite of this our Lord remains the faithful Son, for He confesses even as He suffers the wrath of God for all sin and the hellish onslaught of the Devil's assaulting darkness, "Eloi, Eloi" that is, "My God, My God."

Thus far the deaths of the Divine Middle Man and of the impenitent, unbelieving thief on the cross who dies at His left hand.

But another is dying on Golgotha, specifically, the believer who is crucified with Christ, the repentant thief who has been made alive by the Word even as he is dying in this world. Jesus has given him the Word of promise, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). So there the thief who is condemned to death in this world is born from above, and the man who is a disciple of death is finally made alive in the last handful of hours on this earth, and the condemned sinner is declared a saint, and his inheritance changes from hell to Paradise.

Is this man's death any better? With respect to his eternal outcome, the answer is absolutely yes. He

has a place at the wedding feast of the Lamb and always and forever is in the gracious Presence of the LORD God. With respect to this soul the answer is most certainly. No one but God is able to destroy the soul in hell and God has just declared the full pardon of this one. With respect to the body the answer is ... well, consider what will take place in the life and death of the repentant thief on the cross in the next couple of hours.

The believer hears the Word of promise and hope applied to him personally and individually, in this case, the Lord Himself tells the repentant sinner that he would be with Him in Paradise before 6:00 pm. Then Jesus dies and the Messiah Who has promised Paradise is no longer alive and there on the cross as He once was. The thief has not only heard the Word of the Messiah addressed to him but also the Word of the Son of God addressed to the One Who has left Him, "Eloi, Eloi; Lamasabachthani - that is, ‘My God, My God; why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Where is the promise now that Jesus has died? The pangs and pains due to death by crucifixion are real. In the darkness the creation quaked, the two creatures pinned to their cross were jostled about on the Roman nails and the pain and agony increased for both of them. Jesus is now dead. One thief has the word of the Law awaiting him; the other has the Word of the Gospel. After 3:00 in the afternoon the sun dawns for the second time that day. What do both unbeliever and believer see shortly? It is a Roman hammer in the hands of the soldiers who will break their legs to hasten death "in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day)" (John 19:31). Both behold the mallet of man and the end of life coming. One sinner has eternal death awaiting him; the other has eternal life. One has nothing to die for; the other has nothing to live for. One lives in the lie that he will be delivered from the cross; the other dies in the truth that he will be delivered by the cross.

Though God appears to depart when the believer finds himself or herself suffering, it really is at that time when the LORD is especially and graciously present. Even though the Christian might behold the end of this life and see no worldly indication that God is either with him or favorable disposed toward him, still he believes in the Word. We have heard this voice of faith from God's people - from the mouth of Job, "Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and He that vouches for me is on high" (16:19) and "though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (13:15). The truth is as the psalmist confesses, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (116:15).

As death draws near the believer there is the great opportunity for you, the Christian, to bear witness "for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). The repentant thief does this very thing when he bears witness to the truth that the Jesus is the innocent, sinless Savior. He said to the other thief, "we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41). While the unrepentant thief rejected the truth, this Word of God did go forth and accomplish its purpose. For at the death of Christ the Roman centurion stood facing Jesus and confessed that this Jesus of Nazareth is the Incarnate Son of God. The man overseeing the crucifixions "praised God, and said, ‘Certainly this Man was innocent!'" (Luke 23:47). "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39).

So what of you, dear soul? Please hear the trusting Word of the faithful Son from the cross. Listen to Him. "At the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'" Because He was forsaken in your place, you will never, ever have to say, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Truly, as the day draws near and you find yourself facing the last hour, you will be able to say, "'Eloi, Eloi' which means, 'my God, my God." Amen.