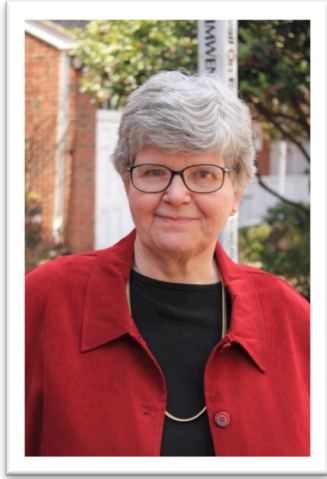


Good Friday Reflections
Old First Reformed United Church of Christ
April 18, 2014

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"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34)

The Fourth Word is the only one of the Seven that is a question. We know this question. Every one of us has asked it, probably many times. Jesus's question is central to our understanding of the Seven Last Words.

We reach our limit, overcome by pain, by grief, by confusion and anger, by hopelessness. God cannot possibly be here, in all this pain and struggle. Why? Why? We want a reason, a "because" to answer our "why."

Jesus asks why, but his "why" is a cry of agony, not a question that can be answered. His words are from Psalm 22.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?"

"Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help."

Trouble is near. Where are you, God? You who created us and saw that it was good?

In our own lives - a troubling diagnosis, a family crisis, the death of a loved one. All around us - homeless people in our city, murder victims whose names we don't know, endless wars and destruction, Shoah, 9/11 !

Our agony is all the greater because we will never have the answer we think we are seeking. The question and the lament are at the center, the very heart, of how we come to a faithful understanding of how God is working through Jesus. There is more than "because."

In the midst of his pain Job said "God gave, and God has taken away; blessed be God's name.", and after the lament, the writer of Psalm 22 praises God.

"For God did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; God did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried."

I learned a little about this on a summer day in 1961, when my brother died suddenly. In tears, I demanded loudly, of no one in particular, why God let this happen. This picture is engraved in my mind: that afternoon, our neighbor stood at the stove, fixing some supper for the family who likely wouldn't eat a single bite. But it was something she could offer, and so she cooked. She was almost talking to herself. "Honey, God is just as sad as we are." Thinking about this over the years, I've come to see her quiet, firm statement not as a reason, because there is no reason, but as a statement of faith, because there is faith.