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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
3 April 2026

Good Friday Sermon on Psalm 22

Worship Theme:

THE SOURCE OF SALVATION

On Good Friday, we remember the crucifixion and death of our Lord. The Son of Man was lifted up on the cross to the glory of God and for our salvation. While others see a wounded man, we see the source of eternal salvation. We pray to him with confidence, remembering what he has done for us.

Sermon Theme: **“Why Have You Forsaken Me?”**

I can't help but wonder if these are the heaviest, most serious, most agonizing words ever spoken: *“My God, my God – **why have you forsaken me?**”* It is not a small thing to be forsaken. “Forsaken” isn't a word we use very often in our conversations anymore, except perhaps when referring to this event on this day. It's not a happy word. It's a dread-in-the-pit-of-your-stomach kind of word. It's an I-feel-so-upset-I-might-be-sick kind of word. It's a how-can-I-ever-recover-from-this kind of word. “Forsaken” is totally and completely deserted, abandoned and left entirely alone.

It's a sad and awful reality that some people know what this feels like. Some people know what it feels like to be walked away from and left behind, not accidentally but completely on purpose. They know what it's like to only see the back of a person they thought they knew. They know what it's like to be left alone to handle everything life is throwing at them, not in an I-believe-in-you-and-you've-got-this sort of way, but in an I'm-leaving-you-to-deal-with-this-all-on-your-own-and-I-will-never-be-there-to-help-at-all kind of way. If you're someone who has experienced that, then you know the deep hurt that causes and the scars it leaves, and it's the kind of feeling you wouldn't wish on your least favorite person in the world. All you have at the end is a question: **Why have you forsaken me?**

But here is shocking truth number one for today: you SHOULD be forsaken. Yes, you heard me right. There's no sugar-coating this truth. You deserve to be completely abandoned and deserted and left alone, exactly the same way I deserve to be completely abandoned and deserted and left alone. But it isn't other people who should be doing this to us, because every member of the human race finds themselves in the same boat you and I are in. Rather, every human being deserves to be forsaken by God.

And today of all days, you and I don't get to brush past this too quickly. We deserve to be abandoned and deserted by God because of our sin, which means our sins are a very big deal – every single one of them! There are no little pet sins or tee-hee wink-wink oopsy-daisy-you-caught-my-hand-in-the-cookie-jar kinds of sin. Every sin damns us to hell. And I understand that has become a bad word that people misuse in all kinds of situations, but this is the one situation where it's used correctly. To damn something means to condemn it to a punishment or fate,

especially to the punishment of hell. Every single one of your sins and every single one of mine gives God Almighty the right to judge us with the harshest of outcomes, giving us the most unimaginable sentence, inflicting us with an eternal home in blazing fire that never lessens or goes out. And because we don't get to brush past sin too quickly, we don't get to brush past hell either. If you've ever burned your hand in a fire, you know how quickly that can cause serious damage and pain. Hell is fire that never stops burning us. Never. This will be for the rest of unending time, which is a concept our brains can't even understand – it's that long. God should judge us, damn us, and forsake us – alone for eternity in unending torment and death. And we wouldn't need to ask “**why have you forsaken me?**”, because we would already know why. The worst part of that feeling would be knowing the judgment is just and deserved and that God was right to do it to us.

We dare not forget that. We dare never forget that this truly is what our sins deserve. And as uncomfortable and hard as it is to hear, hear it we must, or else we will never understand the incredible magnitude of what comes next.

You see, as shocking as truth number one is, there is another shocking truth today too. Shocking truth number two is this: what God should have done to us, God HASN'T done to us. And there's a very simple reason why he hasn't: because someone else stepped in to take our punishment instead. Yes, you heard me right. The punishment you rightly deserve will never be yours, because a substitute stepped forward and claimed it as their own instead. If you're willing, would you please bow your head and close your eyes for the next couple minutes until I say? Imagine you're sitting in a courtroom. You've just been condemned for the most heinous crimes and you're about to hear a sentence you couldn't complete in a thousand lifetimes. Your head is down and you're weeping uncontrollably because you can't even comprehend the magnitude of the punishment you're being given. But then the proceedings take the most insane, unfathomable, unexpected turn anybody ever heard of in the history of everything. Someone else in the room stood up, went before the judge, and insisted in no uncertain terms that your punishment be given to them instead. You will go free with not even a tiny dent in your record, and they will serve your sentence in full. You can't believe your ears, surely it must be some kind of trick, but the judge makes the declaration that it be so, the gavel falls, and it's done. The innocent person will be condemned for something they didn't do, and you, the one who did commit all the crimes, will go free.

If that sounds unbelievable, then let me assure you it's not. Lift your head, open your eyes, and see the one who stepped in to save you. It's Jesus. Look at the cross in front of you. THAT CROSS ISN'T YOURS! It belongs to Jesus. And the only reason it belongs to him instead of to you and me is because Jesus chose to take it and everything that came with it. The most heinous record of crimes there is – Jesus took it. The punishment and sentence which couldn't be completed in a thousand lifetimes – Jesus took it. Even the words of the question we are focused on tonight: “**Why have you forsaken me?**” – Jesus took this too.

Do you recognize what that means? That dreadful awful pit-of-your-stomach agony of being abandoned and deserted? God will never be the reason you feel it.

It is my sincere prayer that you will never feel it because of another person either. But as much as I wish I could, that's not something I can promise you. I can, however, completely confidently reassure you that God will never do that to you. He will never leave you or forsake you, he will never abandon you or forget you. He loves you too much.

In fact, he proved it on this very day. God decided he would rather forsake HIMSELF than forsake you. After all, Jesus is God the Son, the Word-made-flesh, the Holy One who entered his own creation as a human being to save our fallen race. God the Father is also God, the Holy Judge who has every right to condemn and punish anyone who breaks his law. But on Good Friday afternoon, the number of human beings who had broken God's Law and would receive his full wrath and punishment changed from "ALL of us" to "only one." Jesus. The only truly innocent law-keeper there has ever been now became the only guilty law-breaker there has ever been. Our guilty record became his; his innocent record became ours.

As a result, Jesus now faced mockery, spit, whips, nails, hammer, and cross, as well as something we can't even understand or fully explain: Jesus forsaken. God estranged from God. As much as we hope and pray that no one will ever have to ask the question, "**why have you forsaken me?**", we know for a fact that only one will ever ask it this way: "*My God, my God – why have you forsaken me?*" Even as he cried out those agonizing words, Jesus knew the answer. God had forsaken God for you. For me. The guilt, the punishment, the sentence, the pain, the torture, the abandonment, all of it – Jesus took it all. Jesus paid it all. Jesus accomplished it all.

What does that mean for us? It means, no matter what people may say about us or do to us, we have an unchanging truth to cling to for dear life: God will never forsake us. Jesus was already forsaken. That's done now. Punishment for sin is over. Now we are no longer disobedient rebellious sinners in God's eyes. He has made us pure and holy and declared us to be his children. How deep the Father's love for us is!! Instead of forsaken, we are forgiven. Jesus proves it. The cross proves it. We dare not forget this. It is the greatest news we will ever hear. Freed, forgiven, loved, forever. Good Friday, indeed. Amen.

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.