

**SOLEMN GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE April 14, 2006**  
**St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI**

**“Forsaken for Us! We Are Set Free and Have Direct Access!”**

**Matthew 27:45-46, 50-54**

Have you ever felt forsaken? Have you ever been deserted by all your family and friends? Have you ever felt forsaken and left all alone by your God? That can be a terrible and frightening feeling. King David expresses what that is like in Psalm 13. “How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and everyday have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death; and my enemy will say, “I have over come him,” and my foes will rejoice when I fall.” (Psalm 13:1-4) David speaks of the terror and fear that courses through a person’s mind. He also expresses the anger he has with God when he demands an answer from his heavenly Father.

Today we are remembering a true forsakenness by God. Today, Good Friday, we are remembering that Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, was truly forsaken by his heavenly Father. What does that mean to be forsaken by God? None of us have truly been forsaken by our heavenly Father. Even David in Psalm 13 after expressing his feelings and thoughts concludes by saying, “But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has been good to me.” (Psalm 13:5-6) Even though David may have felt forsaken and forgotten by his Heavenly Father, he knew that was not the case. However in the case of Jesus on the cross, he was truly forsaken by his Father. He was not expressing a feeling. He was expressing a fact. He has been forsaken by his heavenly Father.

What does it mean to be forsaken by God? God leaves you all alone. He removes all of his blessings from you. What was happening? Jesus was suffering the torments of hell while being nailed to that cross. He was not in hell but he was suffering the punishment of hell – being forsaken by God. God had placed on him the sins of the entire human race. Your sinfulness, my sinfulness, the sinfulness of every human being that has ever lived or ever will walk on this planet was placed on Jesus. All our actual sins, our unkind and evil thoughts and words; every misdeed and rebellious act was laid upon the innocent Son of God. Jesus was being cursed, damned for our sins. As the Bible says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” (Galatians 3:13a) If you think that sin is no big deal, then look at the cross. Listen to your Savior’s cries and screams. Realize that our God hates sin and sinners. He does not tolerate any misstep, any little flaw or mistake. The Bible says, “The LORD does not leave the guilty unpunished.” (Exodus 34:7b) So when Jesus is crying out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” he is suffering hell, the punishment of your sins and mine.

Why was Jesus forsaken by his heavenly Father? He did that for you and me. Our Savior once said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) Jesus willingly allowed himself to be arrested, unjustly tried, convicted and executed so that we might be set free. As Paul writes, “God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) What is happening here is in fulfillment to what Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

After Jesus completed his work of enduring the punishment of our sins, he willingly gave up his spirit. Matthew writes, “And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.” (v. 50) Jesus did not die as a result of the crucifixion. He did not die from asphyxiation, loss of blood or heart failure. He gave up his spirit. His work was finished. He could depart in peace and victory.

When Jesus did die some dramatic things happened which have great significance and meaning for your life and mine. Certain miracles took place that tell us what the suffering and death of Jesus Christ mean in our lives in 2006.

The first miracle that Matthew records for us is the tearing of the curtain in the temple in Jerusalem. Matthew writes, "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." (v. 51) What's Matthew talking about? The temple of God in Jerusalem was divided into two parts. There was the holy place and the holy of holies. These two sections were divided by a curtain. In the holy place were three pieces of furniture. They were the seven branched candlestick, the table on which was placed the consecrated bread and the altar of incense. Only the priests were allowed in the holy place. At the time when the curtain was torn was 3 p.m. which was the time when the priest would have been in the holy place offering the evening sacrifice. The Holy of Holies was the place where in Solomon's temple was the Ark of the Covenant. Once a year the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood on the ark for the sins of the people. It signified that through the shedding of blood comes the forgiveness of sins. Remember in that ark were the two tablets of stones on which were written the Ten Commandments that God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai. When the High priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat, the cover of the ark, it showed that the blood of the lamb covered over the law with its demands and judgments. In Jesus' day the Holy of Holies was empty because the ark had disappeared when the Temple of Solomon was destroyed during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Captivity. So what did the tearing of this curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies signify? God was showing that mankind has direct access to our Creator through Jesus Christ. We don't need a priest to enter the Holy of Holies for us. Jesus, our perfect High Priest entered once for all with his own blood. You and I are now priests before our God and we can go to our heavenly Father directly. We don't need a human intermediary.

The second miracle is even more interesting and is only mentioned by Matthew and you never hear much said about it. There was an earthquake and the tombs of many believers who had died were opened and these people rose from the dead. Listen to Matthew's account, "the earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people." (Vv. 51c-53) Saints rose from the dead. They did not go into Jerusalem until after Jesus rose from his grave. Matthew tells us that they appeared to many people. This miracle reminds us that death has been defeated. The grave can no longer hold any of us in forever. Just as those people rose from the dead we also will rise from our own graves because death has lost its power. Jesus destroyed death for us by his own death. What happened to these people? The Bible doesn't tell us. There are some who believe that these people rose with their glorified bodies and later were just taken into heaven as were Enoch and Elijah in the Old Testament. We are not specifically told. But we do know that now you and I need fear death as little as going to bed. Because we know that death has lost its sting and power over us.

Matthew then records the words of the Roman centurion who with his guards were standing watch and had seen to the crucifixion of Jesus. With the darkness which had covered the earth from noon until three o'clock and then the resulting earthquake and accompanying events, this had made an impression on these men and they were terrified. They were forced to acknowledge who it was that they had just crucified. The centurion said, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (v. 54c) They had executed the King of the Universe. It reminds us of what the Bible says will happen, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongues confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11) Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the world's Saviors, yours and mine.

Jesus Christ was forsaken for you and me. He endured hell on the cross for us. His work has given us direct access to our heavenly Father. He was forsaken so that you and might never be forsaken and deserted by our God. He destroyed death so that we don't have to fear death. He has conquered the grave so that we might rise from our own graves. Because Jesus was forsaken we have been set free and we have direct access to our loving heavenly Father.

Amen.