

Many are the wounds we inflicted upon our Savior in his Passion, suffering, and death! We have pondered together the wounds of betrayal, apathy, denial, and mockery. We have seen ourselves reflected in Judas, the sleepy three, Peter, and the soldiers. Yet of all the wounds that our Lord received, none so terrorized him as the one we ponder tonight. We did not inflict this wound. It came from his Father—the wound of abandonment.

Out of the unspeakable depth of his agony on the cross, our Lord cries the words of Psalm 22: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” The great Lutheran preacher O. P. Kretzmann commented on this cry of agony:

Suddenly on a Friday afternoon a man was forsaken of God, cut off from the living and the dead, utterly and ultimately alone. It was then, much more than afterward, that he died.

You see, this is sin. It is not merely a matter of murder and adultery and gossip...something to do or not to do! It is always loneliness. It is cutting yourself off from God. It is a deliberate turning away from truth, from goodness, from heaven.

You see, this is redemption. All this he took into himself, alone there in the dark. He became sin for us.

As all the sin of the world is laid upon the Lamb of God, as he owns it as his very own, he experiences what every one of those sins demands: The relationship with his Father is shattered. This is the most bitter part of the cup that Jesus drains for us in its entirety. He will taste hell. He will taste it for us all. He will know the loneliness so profound that its pain is unimaginable for us. How can we begin to understand what it was like for him in that moment—the eternal word, who had delighted in the Father’s presence before the ages came to be; the eternal word, who took on flesh from the Virgin without ever leaving the presence of his Father; the word made flesh, who lived among us, as all people were meant to live: conscious of his Father’s never-failing love and the presence of his guiding hand. And all this is now withdrawn, and Jesus is alone. All alone.

People joke about hell, saying, “Well, at least I will have a lot of company there.” Wrong. utterly wrong. Think of the story of Lazarus and the rich man. In that story, the rich man is all alone. Lazarus has angels for company and Abraham,

to whom he is so close that he can lean on him. The rich man hungers and thirsts for a human touch. “Send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame” (Luke 16:24). But no visit relieves the terror of the rich man’s solitude. He is alone; all alone. Think that through, and you will begin to understand the true terror of hell. Think that through, and you will bow in love before the Savior whose love for you was so great that he chose to enter that loneliness himself and to endure it in your place that you might be set free from it forever. Never alone. Never again.

Because Jesus endured the wound of abandonment that our every sin demands, because he drained the cup down to the last drop, you can look to Jesus and pray with the confidence of being heard:

*My Savior, be thou near me when death is at my door;
then let thy presence cheer me, Forsake me nevermore!
when soul and body languish, o leave me not alone,
But take away mine anguish By virtue of thine own! (LSB 450:6)*

Do you see? Do you understand the majesty of the Gospel? You will never have to know what Jesus went through in those darkest hours. You will never have to face life or suffering or death alone. He has made sure of it. He will be with you. He will walk with you every step of the way. Hell is undone, death destroyed, sin forgiven.

We hear once more from O. P. Kretzmann:

Above his “eli, eli” was the sound of tearing veils, of falling walls, of the glad crying of those who now had a home again after the long loneliness of sin. They would continue to wander, groping, stumbling, falling, in all the black ways which man will walk when they turn away from God. But there was a way back now, beyond Jerusalem and beyond thought and hope to the place where the open arms of the cross had become the gates of heaven. (The Pilgrim, 47)