

“How long, O Lord”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Thank you gathering together this evening for Midweek Lenten Prayer. When individuals gather together in Jesus’ name, we become Christ’s body, the church. The biblical image of Christ’s body as the church encourages and strengthens us so that we might encourage and strengthen one another when we are feeling forgotten, lonely, or grieving.

These moments when we are feeling forgotten, lonely, or grieving are moments when gathering as Christ’s body can be healing and transformational. Yet in such moments of suffering, we may also feel the hiddenness of God most acutely. This evening’s psalm, Psalm 13, speaks of this: “*How long, O Lord...How long will you hide your face from me?*” The hiddenness of God is an ancient biblical theme. For example, Isaiah 45:15 reads, “*Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.*” God is hidden in our laments, yet God is always present even when we feel alone.

When we are traveling under blue skies, healthy, and feeling at the top of our physical and intellectual powers, God’s hiddenness doesn’t seem to bother us, yet in our suffering we can also cry out, “*How long, O Lord, will you hide your face from me? How long must I suffer? When will I again rejoice?*”

I think it’s such a universal phenomenon that it hardly seems worth saying, but each person thinks their burdens are the heaviest. We feel our laments our grief, pain, and sorrow as those burdens hardest to bear.

Tonight’s gospel reading helps us struggle with lament by seeing that Jesus also shares in our humanity. In the Passion narrative in Matthew, the world was without light as Jesus cried out from the cross, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”

This passage reveals Jesus’ experience of the hiddenness of God. The world was without light and Jesus felt alone, forgotten, and abandoned, giving voice to his lament from the cross. Jesus suffered in our humanity so that we might never again be far from God.

In those moments when we feel alone or abandoned, we may feel furthest from God, but in reality, we are really the closest to God. Jesus’ cross and suffering are the evidence of God’s sharing in our human suffering. In Jesus’ feelings of forsakenness, God “has some skin in the

game,” so to speak.

In sharing our humanity, Jesus emptied himself and in doing so shared our emptiness. Jesus shares in the limits of our mortality. Martin Luther wrote of this in the following way, “The person who has been emptied through suffering no longer does works but rather, knows that God works and does all things through them” (*Heidelberg Disputation*, 24). This is why Luther always pointed to Jesus and the cross as the place where God’s love and compassion are most clearly seen.

This is why we turn the altar cross during Lent to reveal the God hidden in suffering. The cross is the heart not only of Lent, but of the Christian life of discipleship. The way of the cross is counterintuitive to the way we are taught to think about ourselves and our strengths. We have learned to deal with all of life’s daily problems without ever thinking about or turning to God. Just as we view science and technology as “modern saviors” of our daily problems, we have come to see moments of suffering as empty and harrowing experiences outside of our strength and therefore outside of salvation.

Yet our modern understandings of ourselves don’t stop the laments from coming – from places of war, places of illness, places of loneliness and abandonment. The world and all people continue to give voice to Jesus’ words from the cross, “O God, why have you abandoned me?” How long, O Lord, must I suffer?” Suffering and lament continue to rupture modern life, reminding us of our need for human community with one another and with the God who knows and who transforms our suffering with new life, hope, and possibility.

To people shaped by modernity, the cross reminds us that in ultimate matters of life and death, we are not autonomous, and we do not live without God. Even as we seem to suffer and die alone, we are constantly with God. This is why we look to the cross: we see God’s power revealed in weakness and suffering. Only the suffering God can help.

In matters of the world, of politics and industry, we look to leaders who present themselves as all-knowing, and even almighty. In daily life weakness, frailty, and powerlessness are constantly rejected, and yet when we realize that our leaders are also broken and weak, we reject them also, because weakness and frailty are not acceptable qualities in modern life.

The cry of Jesus from the cross reminds us of precisely why God comes into our lives: to suffer with us because we are all weak and frail. As human beings, we know the alienation that weakness brings, and we hear the lament in Jesus’ cry, “*My God, my God, why have you*

*forsaken me?"*

As Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, his cry of lament from the cross transfigures our human suffering, opening us to his grace.

When we gather together in Jesus' name, we are transfigured into Christ's body, the church, a servant church emptying ourselves for others.

As Christ's body we respond to the sufferings of this world as Jesus responds to our sufferings.

Daily, look to his cross. He is transfiguring you into his body in this world.

Through you, your neighbor is never alone.

Jesus is offering hope and new life through you. Amen.