

Where is God? Experiencing Disorientation

This morning we continue our focus on Psalms of disorientation and reorientation. I am finding it to be a difficult series for me to preach – because it brings to surface in my life ways I am being disoriented and reoriented. I am discovering that being disoriented is not only painful, but so is being reoriented – because being reoriented challenges me to let go of the old orientations in which I am in control, or so I think, of my old ways of being. Being reoriented is a painful experience – as any birth is.

As we focus on Psalm 22 today, we pick up Psalm 22 near its end – in which praise is being given to God,

But it begins in lament,
with a soul wrenching cry
– the kind of cry that is so painful and devastating that you need to turn away:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest”

Such a cry is a disorienting cry.
It’s a cry when your whole world is falling apart.

Have you ever cried out like that?

I have!

(Though the relationship my daughter Hilary and I now have is a ever developing gift from God, and she is much more gracious in telling of this story, than I am of myself in this story)

Over 5 years ago or so, my daughter Hilary and I did not see eye to eye on a number of things – many things.

And in one of our arguments I came to realize that her feelings of being alienated, being abandoned, her “hardness” had to do with my selfishness, my putting myself ahead of what her needs when she was very young, my pursuit of my pastoral and academic career.

Hilary has a very vulnerable spirit; she always has – and she has learned how to protect herself, when that should never have been her responsibility in her young life.

I should have been there to nurture her, but I injured her soul – in chasing after my dreams.

In coming to realize my responsibility for my daughter’s “hardness” her “lostness,” a deep wail emanated from me – from deep within my soul – so physical that it caused my knees to buckle

I had no sense of God at that moment – only the dread of how my selfishness deeply injured my daughter.

We are disoriented when we cannot find God, when we do not know where God is.

We are decimated when it seems God abandons us
– in fact, it does not merely seem like God has abandoned us
– the only feeling we have is God has abandoned us
– God is not near; God is not answering our cries.

It is a cry addressed to God
– where are you? Why are you silent?

In the covenant, God had with God's people, God has promised to be their God, to be with them, to go with them.

When Moses asked God who shall I say is sending me, God said to him – “I will be with you” (Exodus 3:12)
– **So where is God,**
Where is “I will be with you” now?

As we approach Holy Week
– we realize that Jesus cried out this same phrase
– actually he was expressing this Psalm – from the cross – “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”
(cf. Matthew 27: 45-46).

A common understanding is that Jesus cried this cry of abandonment because he took our sin upon him, and as a result God turned his face away from Jesus – i.e., abandoning him.

It seems that God could not handle God's divinity, hidden in Jesus, being polluted, infested, with human sin.

But, I believe, that is to misunderstand God's action and Jesus' incarnation and what happened on the cross.

Jesus in his incarnation, already took on our sinful humanity (cf. Romans 8: 3)

“God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering.”

Jesus in becoming a human inhabited the only humanity available to him
– our broken humanity, our sinful humanity
– there was no other kind of humanity.

God's love for us was so deep that God embraced every aspect of who we are
– though Jesus did not add to the brokenness and sinfulness humanity with his own actions.

So, Jesus' cry on the cross could not be God abhorring God's character being associated with sin – God's love for us already brought God, in Jesus, into connection with human sinfulness.

So what is this cry of abandonment of Jesus on the cross?

I think it has to do with the ultimate disorientation that only death can bring.

Craig Broyles, commenting on Psalm 22 – makes this clear.

He states in this psalm, “Enemies are prominent, but the actions clearly attributed to them are not of direct attack but of scorn (vv. 6-8).

With this scorn, they surround the speaker and await his death (vv. 12-13, 16-18)” (Broyles, *Psalms*, 116).

The great risk that God was taking in Jesus, the great “fear” if you will, was that the God of life, the Son of life, was entering into death
– the place where life does not exist, the place that is “not God,” the place that is everything that God is not.

To experience and to enter in to something that is antithetical to the being of God is deeply disorienting to Jesus on the cross –

This is a universe-shaking disorientation – God dying.

It is God’s love for us, so infinitely deep, that God experienced the disorientation of death – taking all that binds and oppresses humanity into the grave.

That this is what is going on here is, I believe, further evidenced by the mocking of the chief priests, elders and the teachers of the law.

Their mocking words directed to Jesus on the cross were the exact same words of temptation with which Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness following his baptism with the Spirit

- these tempting words, if heeded, would give him a way out
- a last opportunity to display his divine nature over against his humanity
- to surrender to his pre-incarnational orientation
- avoiding death, avoiding becoming what is not-God in death.

These mocking words; these same words Satan used in tempting Jesus three years earlier:

“He saved others, but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him” (Matthew 27:42-43).

I am sure Jesus struggled with this temptation on the cross.

Yet, in Jesus not succumbing to this temptation

- to take hold of his divinity, the benefits of which he relinquished in becoming human (cf. Php. 2)
- of not taking the last opportunity of yielding to Satan’s temptation
- Jesus chooses to go forward into the unknown (even for God)
- to enter into death

And having wrestled with this temptation, and being resolved to move forward, to move forward into death, that Jesus cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

But his cry was not only crying out of the first line of this Psalm – it was a confession of the whole Psalm – which includes an expression of the reorientation that comes through trusting God to be with him in death.

“For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help” (v 24)

And he expresses a new orientation – a reorientation that can only come through death.

It is a reorientation that only life overcoming death can bring, life that conquers death, the resurrection of a new humanity – a resurrection that leaves the power of sin and death in the grave.

“The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him – may your hearts live forever!”

And Psalm 22 ends with “He has done it!” a word that coincides with Jesus’ last word on the cross – “It is finished!”

The reorientation of a new humanity, is an act of a human Jesus who experienced the devastating disorientation of death for us, and who was raised from the dead by the Spirit of God to be the first to reveal a new kind of life for all humanity.

This is also our reorientation

- to life in our identifying with Jesus
- which also comes after we enter into the disorientation of death and a sense of being abandoned by God. Many of us, at least once in our lives, have experienced this kind of deep disorientation – where our cries have come from deep within our souls, our beings, where our pain, our alienation has emanated from deep within ourselves
- the loss of a child
- circumstances, like I shared earlier, that look like the only outcome will be the loss of a child
- the life-wrenching experience of betrayal by someone we trusted, we love
- the utter darkness of depression, the sense of our being all alone, struggling alone.

We are so disoriented in our lives that it resembles death; it is death
– and God seems to be far off from us.

But the act that reorients each one of us to life is that God has entered into death

And it is precisely the life of God that overcomes the power of death
– all else remains dead – sin, the power of sin, the power of death
– and all that is resurrected lives; all what is connected to the life of God **We live because, in Jesus, the Life of God is in us!**

Jesus was able to cry out from the cross, “It is finished,” “He has done it!” because he came to realize that he was not being abandoned by God in the midst of his being deeply disoriented. God was with him.

In our times of being disoriented – may we also discover and learn to express this cry of hope, this cry of victory – knowing that God is “I am with you”

When we feel alone and cry out “My God, My God why have you abandoned me?”
– may we be open to the courage the Spirit instills to lead us forward through our being disoriented, even the disorientation of death,

To discover not only a reorientation, but to realize that this is a reorientation that fully embraces life.

Life that never ever again is subject to the power of sin and death
– we are forgiven, we are set free

Even as we still struggle with brokenness and sin in our lives – sin and death no longer need to have power over us, need be disorienting.

Daily repentance, daily reorienting of ourselves reminds us that in Jesus we are continually being reoriented to life.

That causes me to break forth in praise, and bow down before God who rules over all creation – being able to confess, “God has done it” “It is finished!”

My mother, at the age of 12, tells of her father’s last words as he lay dying from complications of a stroke near the end of the Second World War as they were fleeing the Russians
– making their way West:

On his death bed he kept expressing, “O how beautiful, O how beautiful.”

When my mother asked what was so beautiful – all he could say is “O how beautiful” as he breathed his last.

**In this season of Lent,
may we learn to cry out to God – with a new cry:**

“My God, my God, you are with me!”