

All Will Be Well

An Easter Message



"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" – Matthew 27:46
"He is not here, for he is risen." – Matthew 28:6

Surely human suffering raises among the most serious problems for Christian faith of any we encounter: How can God be good and powerful and yet not do something about suffering? These two statements, spoken at pivotal moments in the Passion and Easter stories, proclaim that God *has* done something.

First is the "cry of dereliction." Earlier in John's Gospel at the grave of Lazarus, Jesus had expressed unshakeable confidence that God was always there for him: "I knew that you always hear me," he had said. But now he faces utter abandonment, the kind C. S. Lewis poignantly described in *A Grief Observed*: "Go to . . . [God] when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence."

But if the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is true, then we are not simply witnessing a human tragedy here. This is God among us, as Isaiah put it, come to take up "*our* pain," to bear "*our* suffering," to be "pierced for *our* transgressions" and "crushed for *our* iniquities." In Gethsemane and at his arrest, Jesus faces betrayal and the unfaithfulness of the friends on whom he depended. In the garden he bears the mental anguish of anticipating what lies ahead, along with the torment of false hopes that it might even now, at this late hour, be avoided. After that, there is the physical torment of the cross and, ultimately, the spiritual agony captured in that wail of despair. In the cry of dereliction, God proclaims his fierce solidarity with our suffering.

But there is also that second cry, "He is not here, for he is risen," announced by the angel to the women who had come to finish embalming the body of their friend and Lord. Against all hope, at what seemed to be the moment when evil had vanquished good, and at their own personal moment of greatest disappointment and sadness, came these words of triumph. He is alive again.

How does God deal with suffering? He embraces it, takes it into himself. But he also overcomes it, first in the resurrection of Christ and finally, we believe, in our own resurrection. In the first cry we take comfort. When we feel abandoned God says, "I am still here." In the second cry, we take hope. At our moments of greatest disappointment and loss God says, "I have overcome. All will be well."

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