

## Abandonment

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was not simply silent on the cross. He spoke seven times. Because we have four accounts of his death, each one offers a different glimpse of his majesty and his agony.

But his cry from the cross in Matthew is extreme. It expresses the utter desolation of one abandoned not only by his friends but even as it seemed by God himself. The painful dereliction of his cry, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ shows with what intensity Jesus had lived his special relationship with the Father, whom, uniquely, he had called, ‘Abba.’ And now that has gone. It is the most harrowing moment in the Gospel.

But the full humanity of Jesus, the Son of God, was thereby fully revealed. His terrible cry, like birth from his mother, testifies to the real incarnation of God. Jesus immersed himself so fully in our humanity that he freely embraced the bitterest of all experiences – not only pain and death but even the loss of God. It will always be an unfathomable mystery to us how the Son of God could experience that.

A popular hymn says,

*I cannot tell how silently he suffered...*

None of us can tell. But we *can* tell about our own and others’ misery. We *can* tell about suffering, when life appears to lose its meaning and even God seems far away. We *can* tell about the violence, death-camps, torture, and unrelenting cruelty perpetrated by human beings in every era, including our own.

On Good Friday, God’s Son identified himself with our misery at its worst. Jesus never said, ‘No,’ to God, yet in solidarity with us, who do say, ‘No!’, he underwent abandonment, losing all awareness of his

Father's presence. His obedience cancelled our disobedience. On Good Friday, as we stand before his cross, the deepest mystery of all, God's self-emptying love, is set before us. Hanging on the cross, Jesus is God's perfect Word, his final message to us. There isn't anything else we need to know about God and nothing else to tell. It is perfectly summarised in his name, 'Jesus', which means, 'God's salvation.' Face to face with that, the Father giving up his Son for us, the Son giving himself for us, we can only bow in gratitude, adoration, and love.

But that terrible cry of abandonment in Matthew was not Christ's only cry on the cross. There are four Gospels. According to Luke, Jesus also cried out in another, very different way. The second one was not like the first. This one was a cry of trust: 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!'

If we take the total witness of the Gospels, it seems that Jesus on the cross went through the whole range of human emotions, from abandonment to acceptance. The first cry, recorded by Matthew, was one of dereliction; the second, recorded by Luke, one of acceptance. In Christ's final abandonment into God's hands, he made a supreme act of trust in his Father whom he could neither see nor hear, but whom he knew was there, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary.

That triumphant shout of self-giving love was his return to the Father who had sent him. In those final moments, Jesus gathered up his whole life and death and offered them to God in a last great act of sacrifice. And the Father heard him: Easter would be God's answer. From the agony of abandonment by God to the triumph of self-abandonment, from the cross to the Father, Jesus teaches us not only how to live but also how to die.