

The Fourth Word

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[0:00] The Gospel according to Mark, chapter 15, verse 34. And at three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Allahi, Allahi, lama sabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Broken and bloodied, naked in body and spirit, Jesus calls out to God using the words of David in the 22nd Psalm.

Allahi, Allahi, lama sabachthani. The cross is the crossroads, the intersection of God and humanity, the Lord and all of the rest of us.

All of our darkness, all of our brokenness, all of our garbage, heaped upon the one who is totally innocent, so that that curtain can be torn in two, and we can come into the presence of the Father. In that moment, Jesus is so human, abandoned, betrayed, sad, and broken. He also becomes a repository for all of humanity's worst characteristics, taking our sin into and onto himself, and the Father turns his face away.

[1:39] Looking around at the damaged world and at my broken and bent self, the weight of all that being placed on Jesus breaks my heart.

He cries out, and I cry out with him, when my sin and the sin of this world overwhelms me. I love him so much as I think of him in that moment, taking it all on, on my behalf.

Allahi, Allahi, lama sabachthani. 16 years ago, my husband Glenn and I ran a youth group out of our house, and we had kind of this ragamuffin, exuberant, diverse bunch of kids.

Our small church was in Cornwall's east end. It was kind of a run-down part of town. And a lot of these kids actually came to our church on their own.

So that was pretty powerful. That particular year, 16 years ago about right now, we decided we'd ask the interim priest if we could put on a passion play during Holy Week, and we would only cast the kids.

[2:59] So it's a bit of a... The teens were cast for the speaking parts. When it came to Jesus, we made what I guess would have been a fairly unconventional choice. We cast a 14-year-old boy named Scott who had this pink and yellow punk spiked hair.

And he was an interesting kid, and he had a really bit of a talent for acting. So we rehearsed for several weeks, and little by little, the members of the congregation got curious, and they gave us props, and they were really super in encouraging the kids.

So we even went to the local lumberyard, and we had them cut out a large cross beam for us. Not quite 100 pounds, but it was pretty heavy. On Palm Sunday, we gathered the kids together in this small sanctuary.

There wasn't a lot of room. And anyway, the kids began to present Christ's journey to the cross. And one of the signature moments for Glenn and myself was when Scott, Jesus, fell to his knees under the weight of the cross beam and called out, We're never going to forget the impact of that moment.

[4:23] Jesus, with the punk spiked hair, crying out to God. Well, fast forward from that Passover, our Passion Sunday, about eight years later, we're in a funeral home.

And we're paying our respects to a grieving family because there had been a 16-year-old boy who had been sitting in his math class in Cornwall, and he was knifed to death by another student.

And Albert, this young man who'd been killed, had been a member of my Sunday school class, and a server in the church, and a first cousin of Scott, who played Jesus.

So it was heartbreaking because his father actually had cancer, and he was dying. And his mother, they're sitting there, and they're holding hands in front of the casket. And there was no sense to be made of what had happened.

The death just didn't make any sense. And the pain that this family was experiencing was absolutely excruciating. And there was just nothing to do but to share the grief and to pray. [5 : 32] And as we were standing there sharing with this family, we saw this striking young man come in, and it turned out to be Scott. And we hugged, and we wiped away tears.

And then I asked him, So do you remember playing the role of Jesus? And his face was transformed in that moment, and his father smiled.

And I knew then that that performance and those words had impacted him profoundly. Allahi, Allahi, lama sabachthani. That year, 2008, unbelievably, we buried two children, 16-year-old Albert and 5-year-old Alyssa, out of that little, well, they had both been family, and families of that little church. Innocent victims of murder, both of them, in a small city. It was unbelievable. And these were such devout and faithful families, and their hearts were broken.

They already had difficulties, and then this was heaped upon them. And our hearts were broken because we not only had lost these beloved children, but the little church had been closed a year earlier, and the families felt they had no place to go, and they had no building, and they had no pastor or priest to offer words of comfort.

[6 : 53] And yet, a scattered and grieving community came together and wept at the foot of the cross with those families. They went to Jesus. The sin was real, and the pain was real, and a feeling of abandonment was real, and it couldn't be avoided.

But where else could they go? Where else could we go, as Peter once said, but to Jesus on our knees? So, back to the cross, and our identification with the one who took all of that onto himself. Allahi, Allahi, Lama, Shabbat Kani. So, whenever some of my sincere Christian friends want to jump right into the Easter celebration on Good Friday and go past those horrendous moments of pain and separation and suffering on Golgotha, I just feel like I need to remind them that Holy Week is a journey, and that the cross bears the tremendous weight of our sins leading to salvation.

So, we need to take the moments to kneel there for a time and to reflect on just what that means. We cannot know the joy and triumph of Jesus' resurrection on Sunday without Friday's cross, bloody and nail-scarred and full of splinters, and the words of Jesus that echoed there.

Allahi, Allahi, Lama, Shabbat Kani. Amen. Please stand for a minute or so of prayer.

[8 : 34] Father, we ask that you would make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel and learning to live for your glory.

And, Father, we ask as you grip us with what Jesus did for us on the cross on Good Friday, grant, help us, Father, to intercede for others.

Father, we confess before you that there are people we know and people who are close to us and maybe neighbors, and they, Father, have great pain and great suffering that they have to deal with, and they can't call out to you in prayer.

They have nowhere to go. So we ask, Father, that you would help us to intercede for them, that you would grant us hearts and eyes that are open to the pain of others, and that you would teach us and help us to pray for them, that they would know your comfort in their grief and in their pain, and that they would come to you, that they would come to Jesus, that they would come to the one who died for them to take away their pain and to be with them in their pain.

And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.