

**illus:** From 1923-1939, Lou Gehrig played professional baseball for the New York Yankees. He was an All-Star seven consecutive times, an American League MVP twice, and a member of six World Series champion teams. His career batting average was .340, he hit 493 home runs, and finished his career with nearly 2000 RBI's. He was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1939 and was the first player in league history to have his number retired. Gehrig was well-known for both his hitting and his durability; his durability earned him a nickname: "**the Iron Horse.**"

But Gehrig is remembered for more than just his career. Two years after retiring from baseball, the "Iron Horse" died of a rare neurological condition called A.L.S; it's sometimes referred to as Lou Gehrig's disease. A.L.S progressively destroys the motor function of the central nervous system, stealing a person's ability to control their own body. Instead of the body being a vehicle for the person, it becomes a prison of sorts; the mind remains sharp to the end, but the body can no longer follow the mind's impulses to move.

Two years ago one of our own congregants was diagnosed with A.L.S; shock and disbelief quickly followed. *How can this be? I'm an avid musician and tennis player; you mean to say I will lose my ability to play?* Shock and disbelief were followed by courage; *I'm going to fight this, I'm going to pray for a miracle.* Near the end, he came to the place of resignation—*this disease has got the better of me; Game, Set, Match.*

During this past year, my wife had the privilege of being his nurse and I had the privilege of being his pastor. I would sit with him, listen to him, pray for him. Along the way, he asked a question that all of us ask in the midst of suffering: "*My God, my God, why?*"

A flower doesn't ask "why" it blooms or fades; a tree doesn't question why it's struck by lightning; a gazelle doesn't wonder why it's pursued by the lioness; this "why" question is particular to humanity. *Why this and not that? Why me and not you? Why now and not later?*

We ask "why" for many reasons. At times our asking is purely preventive; in discovering the "why" behind something unpleasant, we seek to avoid it in the future. Often we ask "why" because our situation feels "unfair;" we are struggling to find meaning and purpose in our pain.

**When do you ask why?** Perhaps you applied for a job and heard a resounding "no;" maybe you tried out for a school team, band, or choir but didn't make the cut. We want to know *why?*

Some of you work, or have worked, for a large corporation and you've experienced a major down-sizing. Perhaps you've been told that your job has become "redundant." To be redundant is to be unnecessary. And while we may have been told that our job has become unnecessary, what we hear is that we are unnecessary. *Why is this happening to me?*

Perhaps you had a group of friends that decided to "move on," and their new circle didn't include you. Perhaps your parents are consumed with their work and you feel abandoned and neglected. Perhaps your spouse told you that they no longer love you. *Why this? Why now? Why me?*

“*Why?*” is a bottomless pit, a wild-goose-chase. Knowing the answer to our “*why?*” question rarely satisfies; it still leaves us cold, confused, and in pain.

On this day—Good Friday—as we remember the death of Jesus, we pause to consider the question “*why?*” And not simply, “*why did Jesus die?*”; we listen once again to the question Jesus asked from the cross: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”

Let’s turn our attention to the crucifixion account in Mark 15, beginning in vs. 22.

*“22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. 25 It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the jews.*

*27 They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left...the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.”*

*33 At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my*

*God, why have you forsaken me? ”)...37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.”*

Have you ever wondered why Jesus asked “*why?*” Jesus knew what would happen and why. He knew in advance that He would be betrayed; Judas, one of His disciples, Judas, sold Him out for 30 pieces of silver. When Jesus was arrested, the other 11 disciples abandoned Him and ran for their lives; later that evening, Peter denied ever knowing Jesus.

He knew in advance that He would be abandoned by those he’d loved and served, and he agonized over it. Jesus also knew that He would bear the full weight of humanity’s sin, and, the fullness of God’s righteous judgement as a consequence. God is not petty, vindictive, or arbitrary; His judgement falls on sin because it has ravaged this world and all who live in it.

Cognitively, Jesus understood all of this, but affectively, His heart still cried out within Him—the burden of sin and the sense of abandonment was more than He could bear.

The clearest picture of Jesus’ relationship with God Father and God the Holy Spirit comes at His baptism. We’re told that when Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and Father spoke saying: *This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.*<sup>1</sup>

But at the cross, in His humanity, for the first time, Jesus experienced a sense of abandonment. *My God, my God, why?* And the question

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3:17.

Jesus asked is a direct quote from a psalm that King David wrote—Psalm 22.

*“1 My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? ... 7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. 8 ‘He trusts in the Lord,’ they say, ‘let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.’”*

*“14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. 15 My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. 16 Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. 17 All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. 18 They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. 19 But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.”*

What’s interesting is that there is no recorded event in David’s life that matches many of the specific details of Psalm 22. Yes, David endured hostility and threat, but his hands and feet were never pierced, his bones were never on display; we’ve no record of a time when people gambled over David’s clothes. And yet each of these descriptions describe the experience of Jesus as He hung on the cross.

*My God, my God, why?* We can read Jesus’ “*why*” as a complaint, or, as an act of faith—maybe it’s both? When Jesus felt abandoned, **in an act of radical faith**, He cried out to the One He could no longer see, hear, or perceive. In the moment of darkest terror, Jesus cried out

to the One He knew and loved—to the One who knew and loved Him. Even on the cross, Jesus is our Teacher; when we feel God’s absence, in faith we cry out to the One we cannot see, hear, or perceive. But though we can’t see Him, He sees us. Though we can’t hear Him, He hears us.

“*Why?*” is the cry of anguish and despair. The good news of Good Friday is that Jesus has taken up this cry and prayed it on our behalf. Jesus knows what it is to be misunderstood, betrayed, rejected, and abandoned; there is no suffering that He does not understand.

I said last Sunday that in Jesus we One who is both fully God and fully human. Hebrews 1:3 describes Jesus as the radiance (reflection) of God’s glory, and, the exact representation (stamp) of His being. Jesus’ words, being, and action reflect the words, being, and action of God.

By becoming human, God the Son became the representative human being, a substitute if you like, standing in for us. Jesus didn’t live a privileged, pain-free, human life because none of us do; He stepped right into our broken human experience.

The Bible affirms something that we already know from personal experience: **sin builds barriers**. In our non-religious culture, we don’t use the language of “sin” anymore, insisting that there is no universal right or wrong. And yet, with or without this language of sin, the wrongs we have done, and the wrong done to us, cause untold hurt, anger, and separation. Sin builds barrier between us and others; sin builds barriers between us and God.

Eugene Peterson, reflecting on Romans 3:23, wrote the following:

“Since we’ve compiled this long and sorry record as sinners...and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we’re in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

The barriers sin builds are too high to climb over, too deep to burrow under, too long to go around, and too thick to break through. And so, God did for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. Jesus took our sin and shame upon Himself, that we might have an open door to God.

The Bible tells us that Jesus became poor, that we might become rich.<sup>3</sup> Jesus was rejected that we might be accepted. He entered into our forsakenness, and in so doing, He made a way for us to be embraced by God.

Paul Stevenson writes, “The cross represents the culmination of the incarnation—of God with us: on the cross we see divinity fully united with humanity... Therefore nothing that can happen to us—no pain, no humiliation, no journey even into the valley of the shadow of death—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’. The Incarnation shows us that in Christ, God is with us. The cross shows that in Christ, God is with us, no matter what. Even

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, Romans 3:23-24.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:9.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 53:4-5.

when we doubt or disbelieve or think ourselves completely cut off from God, Christ has been there before us.”

**The Lord’s Supper:** This morning we come to the Lord’s Table profoundly aware that the world, and our experience of it, falls short of God’s purposes. God grieves over what’s been broken, He laments what’s been lost, He weeps over the pain we experience.

But God has not been reduced to simply tears, He has acted decisively through Christ to rescue, reconcile, and restore. No pain, no humiliation, no journey even into the valley of the shadow of death—can separate us from the love of God that is for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Isaiah writes, “*Surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering; He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*”<sup>4</sup>

When we suffer pain, when we feel abandoned by God, we continue to ask “*why?*”, but even in our asking—in faith—we cry out to the One we cannot see, hear, or perceive. Though we can’t see Him, He sees us. Though we can’t hear Him, He hears us.

*“The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body,*

*which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”<sup>5</sup>*

This morning, as you partake of the bread and the cup, I want to invite you to come with your pain, your loss, any sense of abandonment, and look upon our crucified Lord. He sees you, knows you, loves you. Even as we partake this morning we pray with David, “*Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.*”

At this time I want to invite those serving the bread and the cup to come forward and take your place; I’d also like to welcome the worship team to come and join me on stage. We will have three stations on the main floor and two stations in the balcony. I’m going to ask that you come row by row, beginning with the back row and moving towards the front. As you come, you will be invited to tear off a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, and then eat with gladness.

## **Worship**

### **Invitation to Prayer Ministry/Benediction**

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.