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Good Friday Meditation on Mark 15:25-34

(Originally delivered as one of five meditations during the Ecumenical Good Friday service at First Baptist Church in Needham, Massachusetts, April 19, 2019.)

Forsaken

Forsaken. Jesus hangs from the cross this night. In the intervening hours, at this point of greatest vulnerability, humiliation, and suffocating pain, he hangs with his companions while people opening deride and revile him, jeering and taunting in his dying. Forsaken. Confronted with pain and suffering, the worst of humanity's callousness bears itself in a hateful dance at the base of the cross as has been enacted throughout the most broken and terrible moments of human history….As it has been in our own country's history at the base of trees where mobs—jeering and inhumane— pervert the sheltering, soaring, life-giving branches into torturous lynching trees of injustice and terror. Forsaken. Abandoned by his disciples and witnessing the pain and horror in the eyes of his mother and the women who refuse to leave her side and his, Jesus hangs suspended in a slow death. Forsaken.

We sing of a "wondrous cross" but on this night, such imagery should be reconsidered. Come Sunday and the strains of Easter's sunrise and empty tomb, perhaps, in hindsight, such language has place. But tonight, as the purple hues of Lent give way to the silence and shadows of death and Sheol, the cross is not wondrous. No. The cross of Good Friday is forsaken.

The Tree of Life is found throughout religious and spiritual traditions across human culture and history. The Tree of Life, along with her sister Tree of Knowledge, form the cosmic tree that universally symbolizes the deep and abiding interconnections of all life, knowing, and being. Reaching deep into the Divine Ground of All Being, the Tree of Life roots in the Source of All Life and reaches skyward providing shelter and shade, sustenance and air to each soul who breathes in its presence and inspiration. In the Genesis story of the Garden of Eden, the fruit of the Tree of Life offers abundant and eternal living.

But on this night, the Tree of Life stands before us not as a source of abundance, or connection, or hope. Rather, we see the Tree cut from its roots, stripped of its fruit, and instead deformed and misshapen into an instrument of brutalizing torture and death. The cross is the Tree of Life forsaken. All that is good and noble and true in the life and teachings of Jesus is severed, cut off, and abandoned, and we are left with the horror of what can happen when human ingenuity and creativity are twisted and defiled by hate and antipathy…but also by complacency and disregard.

On this night, we consider the ways in which we have contributed to the forsaking of the Tree of Life in favor of the cross in the small, daily actions of our lives. We may not have danced at another soul's dying, but we can pause and acknowledge the places of unkindness, lack of compassion and uncaring, and habitual disregard we have enacted for the ongoing pain, suffering, and woundings other souls and our world

experience even now. The thoughtless comment, the silence in the face of prejudice and bigotry alternatively construct the cross of death within our own lives and communities. And so tonight, we pause and consider Jesus' words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and reflect upon our own complicity in severing the Tree of Life in favor of a cross of torment and death…. Amen