

“God Would Never Forsake You”
Rev. Bill Freeman
Sunday, April 9, 2016
Menifee United Church of Christ

A priest and a rabbi are talking. The rabbi says to the priest, “What if you get a promotion? What would you become?” The priest says, “Well, I guess I could become a monsignor.” The rabbi says, “And then what?” The priest says, “Well, I guess I could become an archbishop.” The rabbi says, “And then what?” The priest says, “Well, I guess I could become a bishop.” The rabbi says, “And then what?” The priest says, “Well, I guess I could become a cardinal.” The rabbi says, “And then what?” The priest says, “Well, I guess I could become the pope.” The rabbi says, “And then what?” The priest says, “What do you want? Do you want me to become God?” The rabbi says, “Well, one of our boys made it.”

Jesus was Jewish, of course, although some Christians don’t realize that, or want to ignore it. But Jesus was Jewish, which is why I believe God loves more than just Christians. God must also love Jewish people.

When you think about it, we’re all descendants of Adam and Eve: made in God’s image, blessed by God, loved by God. So, we all must be one. And, when you think about it, we’re all descendants of Abraham: made in God’s image, blessed by God, loved by God. So, we’re all one. And, when you think about it, we’re all descendants of Noah and his family: made in God’s image, blessed by God, loved by God. So, we all must be one. So I believe God loves more than just Christians.

God loves everyone. Not just Christians. Christians and Jews, Buddhists and Hindus, Muslims and everyone. And everyone means everyone. Male and female, young and old, straight and gay. Everyone. And God would not forsake anyone. I don’t think he would.

What does “forsake” mean? Well, Webster’s says that forsake means renounce or turn away from. So, I don’t believe God would renounce or turn away from anyone. God loves everyone. And God would not forsake anyone. God would not forsake you. God would not forsake me. And God would certainly not forsake Jesus.

Jesus has a roller coaster week this week. It starts off nice. Jesus rides on a donkey into Jerusalem, triumphant. People put down palm branches in front of Jesus, in front of the donkey. They shouted, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” That’s why we call this Palm Sunday. Unfortunately, we also call this Passion Sunday.

Jesus immediately goes to the Temple when he enters Jerusalem. He overturns the moneychangers’ tables. (Rev. Bill lifts and drops one side of a table in the sanctuary.) I’m glad I didn’t overturn your coffee. He overturned the moneychangers’ tables and he said, “God’s house is a house of prayer, but you’ve turned it into a den of thieves.” Then he says, “You can listen to the scribes and Pharisees, but listen to what they say and don’t do what they do, because they don’t practice what they preach.” Then he says of the Pharisees, they are hypocrites and blind guides.

So is it any wonder that the scribes and the Pharisees want Jesus killed? And this week they succeed. Judas betrays him, all the disciples desert him, and Peter denies him. And Jesus is tried, convicted, and crucified, nailed to a cross. Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And then Jesus dies. But as they say on TV: To be continued. Or as the late Paul Harvey used to say, “Next Sunday we’ll hear the rest of the story.”

Also, next week (spoiler alert) we’ll learn, as they also say on TV, we’ll learn that God did not forsake Jesus. How could God forsake Jesus? Why would God forsake Jesus? Jesus must have done everything God wanted Jesus to do. Jesus cured the sick, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead. He taught us to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. He taught us to love ourselves, to love our neighbors, to love our enemies. He taught us to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to welcome the stranger. So how could God forsake Jesus? I don’t think he would.

While we can’t heal the sick or raise the dead or give sight to the blind, we certainly can love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. We can love our neighbor as ourselves. We can love ourselves. We can love our enemies. We can feed the hungry. We can clothe the naked. We can welcome the stranger. We can comfort the sick. We can visit the prisoner.

When we do all that, I don’t believe God would forsake us. But the miraculous, grace-ful thing is, that, even if we don’t do any of that, I don’t believe God would forsake us. Because God loves us. God would never forsake us.

C.S. Lewis knows that God would never forsake us. C.S. Lewis, the great Christian author and scholar, says that “although our feelings come and go, God’s love for us does not.” God loves us, no matter what. No matter who we are. No matter what we’ve done.

God is like the father in the parable of the prodigal son. The prodigal son, as you know, has taken his inheritance and gone off and spent it on wine, women, and song. When he runs out of money, he says, “I’ll go back to my father and I’ll repent of my

sins and I'll ask my father for forgiveness. I'll work for him as a hired hand." So, he walks back to his father's land and his father sees him off in the distance and his father runs to him and hugs him and kisses him before he can say a word of repentance. Before he can confess any sins. The father says, "We're going to throw a party, because my son, who was lost, has now been found." That's how God is with us. God would not forsake us. God runs to us and hugs us and kisses us and loves us, no matter what we've done.

"Oh, but Pastor, you don't know what I've done. You don't know the mistakes I've made, the errors I've committed, the sins I've committed. If I was God, I wouldn't forgive me." But that's just it. You're not God. I'm not God. God is better than everybody put together. That's why God forgives us. That's why God won't forsake us.

Maybe you remember the old Etch-a-Sketch thing, with the screen and the knobs, it was orange or red. You could draw on it by moving the knobs or you could write something on it. And then when you were done you could shake it and the writing or the drawing would disappear. Well, that's how our mistakes, our sins, our errors are with God. They appear on God's Etch-a-Sketch. But then God shakes it and our sins disappear. Our sins are forgiven, forgotten, and we are not forsaken.

"Oh, wait a minute, Pastor, how do you know this? What kind of biblical support do you have for this?" Well, I'm glad I asked myself that, because the prophet Isaiah quotes God and says, "I, I am the one who blots out your transgressions and I do not remember your sins." That's God. It's not that God has a bad memory. It's that God has an Etch-a-Sketch and gets rid of our sins, our mistakes, our errors. That's how God is with us. Then our soul is good.

I bought gas a couple of weeks ago. I got out of the car, and a guy was standing right in front of me. He says, "Are you happy with your soul?" I thought, "Oh, no, an evangelist. He probably saw the bumper sticker on my car that says, about our church, 'Lively, Loving, Liberal' and has a rainbow flag on it, a COEXIST sign, a Black Lives Matter sign, and he's probably going to tell me I'm going to go straight to hell unless I change my ways." So, I say to him, "Well, yeah, I'm kind of happy with my soul." He says, "My wife is thinking about getting one of these." I thought, "Oh, he means my Kia Soul!" I said, "Yes, I'm happy with my Soul. My wife and I took my Soul to Michigan and back the last two summers, we're going to do it again this summer. So yes, I'm happy with my Soul."

And I am happy with my soul. And I believe, I humbly submit, that God is happy with my soul. I mean, I'm not perfect. I'm not Mother Teresa. I'm not Dr. King. I'm not Gandhi. But I believe God is happy with my soul. I believe God is happy with your soul. I don't believe God would ever forsake us.

Now, some people might say, "Wait a minute, Pastor, I've been out of work. I've been looking for a job. I feel forsaken by God." Somebody might say, "Wait a minute, Pastor, I've lost a loved one. I feel alone. I feel forsaken by God." I don't know what to say to those people, other than to say that Jesus was crucified on Friday and felt forsaken by God. But then, by Sunday, he knew he wasn't forsaken by God. It was a quick turnaround. I believe that it will be a quick turnaround for everyone. That everyone, somehow, will not feel forsaken by God.

I think we've all, at some point, felt forsaken by God. But then, I think things change. Maybe somebody reaches out to us and we no longer feel forsaken by God. That's who God is. God doesn't want to forsake us. God doesn't forsake us. God helps us. God helps us through.

It's like our final song, the closing song that we sing. I think that song demonstrates that God does not forsake us. We sing, "God be with you 'til we meet again." We know that God is with us until we meet again. God has always been with us. God is never NOT with us, regardless of how we feel, God is never not with us.

But I can imagine somebody who, let's say, a young woman, who's single and finds herself pregnant, and feels alone, feels abandoned, and wants to cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" I can imagine a married man, whose wife has cheated on him, who feels all alone, who feels abandoned by God, who wants to cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" I can imagine somebody who has lost a loved one and feels alone and abandoned by God, and wants to cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

But I don't believe God has forsaken them or will forsake them. I believe eventually God will reach out to them, maybe with the help of someone. God will reach out to the woman who is pregnant so that she doesn't feel forsaken. God will reach out to the married man whose wife has cheated on him so he does not feel forsaken. I believe God will reach out to the person who's lost a loved one so that person does not feel abandoned by God or forsaken by God. Because God would never forsake us.

What about you? Do you know that God would never forsake you? Have you ever felt forsaken by God? Maybe for a time?

I think all of us, I know I, on occasion, have felt forsaken by God for a time. But then, I realized I wasn't. The right person came along, or the right circumstance happened and I did not feel forsaken by God.

Maybe that's what we're supposed to do. Maybe we're supposed to be God's representatives on earth to somebody who feels forsaken, to somebody who's lost a loved one. Maybe it's up to us to reach out to that person so they don't feel forsaken. Maybe it's up to us to reach out to that married man whose wife cheated on him, so he does not feel alone, so he does not feel abandoned by God, does not feel forsaken by God. Maybe it's up to us to help a person who's lost a job and feels alone, feels abandoned by God, that we can reach out to them and they won't feel forsaken by God. Maybe that's why we were put on this earth, to help people so that they don't feel forsaken by God, because I believe God would never forsake anyone.

Let us pray.

God of love,

Help us to know that you would never forsake us,

Help us to know that you would never forsake anyone,

And help us to help others who maybe feel forsaken by you,

Now and forevermore,

By the power of the Holy Spirit

And in the name of Jesus. Amen.

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes
and was transcribed from a recording of it.)*