I. To continue on with responding to the Instant Sermon questions from a few weeks ago; one of the questions was, “What passage in the Bible do you turn to when you need inspiration?”

A. Well that passage that we just read – that’s not it.

B. It’s a good one, and we’ll return to it, but that’s not the one.

C. It did however give me a good sermon title.

D. But nope – that’s not it.

II. Matthew 27:46 – That’s it.
“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”
That’s it.

A. You think I’m kidding don’t you. But nope – That’s it.

B. The scene is Jesus is on the cross.
C. From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

D. This was a phrase, that as Jesus said it, it would have called up all of the imagery of its original setting in the Psalm 22. So let’s take a moment to hear the Psalm to which Jesus words referred.

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
   Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.
3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.
4 In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.
5 To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

6 But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.

7 All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

8 “Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”

9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.

10 On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.
12 Many bulls encircle me,
   strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
13 they open wide their mouths at me,
   like a ravening and roaring lion.
14 I am poured out like water,
   and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
   it is melted within my breast;
15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
   and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
   you lay me in the dust of death.
16 For dogs are all around me;
   a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;
17 I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
18 they divide my clothes among themselves,
   and for my clothing they cast lots.
19 But you, O Lord, do not be far away!
   O my help, come quickly to my aid!
20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
    my life from the power of the dog!
21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!

III. So why would such prayers of desperation and despair bring me inspiration?

A. Well, for one, it reassures me that Jesus was human.

1. I’m sure you are all aware that one of the earliest creeds of the church was written not to affirm Jesus’ divinity, but his humanity.

   a) The Apostle’s Creed was composed to refute the claims of the Gnostic Christians that Jesus was not human, but was really just spirit appearing to be human.

   b) The Gnostics believed Jesus wasn’t really born like a human, nor did he truly suffer like a human and he never really died since he was just spirit; his was all just for appearances.

   c) The Gnostics needed to believe this because they believed that all matter, all material, physical things were evil. Physical things may have a spark of divinity in them, but that was contaminated by the material.
Given this, Jesus could not possibly have been fleshly, physically, materially human. This also meant that the physical universe was not created by God, who was pure spirit and pure goodness; but by a demigod who was evil.

d) So the Apostles Creed states that God did create the universe and it is therein good, that Jesus was born of a woman, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and died – like a human; because he was human.

2. So this doubt, agony, despair and hopelessness that I hear in “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” that reassures me that Jesus was human and truly did share the same fears and doubts and agony that I have felt; that all humans feel.

B. Related to that, this passage tells me that even he, yes even Jesus, experienced despair and all these other horrible feelings.

1. Even the one we admire as having the greatest of faith – even he had times when he felt abandoned.

2. Even the one who did so many good things and spoke and taught so eloquently about a loving God; even he had doubts.
C. Next on my list of why this passage inspires me it that it proves to me that bad things do happen to good people.

1. Jesus is clearly the epitome of a good person; yet bad things happened to him.

2. In fact, they happened to him precisely because he was good.

3. Yes, sometime bad things happen as a direct result of the good that someone does. A friend tells me, “No good deed goes unpunished.” Sometimes that feels so true.

4. It’s not just like some random disease struck someone who is really a nice person; but that evil has befallen this person precisely because of the good they did; because they were doing God’s will.

5. MLK was killed, because of the good he did. Oscar Romero was killed, because of the good he did.

6. Not to put myself with Jesus, Oscar and MLK, but there have been many occasions when I have suffered and I have felt abandoned and questioned my calling because of something I have said or done that I truly believed was the will of God.
7. And every time this passage comes to mind.

D. It strengthens my faith as I recall that even in the midst of his torture and suffering, he reclaimed his faith in God; he reclaimed his trust in the God of love who was there with him, in him, also suffering.

1. In Jesus we find a model of one who truly did suffer doubt and despair, but refused to let it end there.

2. As with the Psalmist, Jesus didn’t let it end at despair, but he reclaimed his faith.

3. You see we ended Psalm 22 before it was actually finished, so let’s listen to how the Psalmist finished the Psalm.

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!

All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
24 For he did not despise or abhor
   the affliction of the afflicted; he did
not hide his face from me, but heard when
I cried to him.
25 From you comes my praise in the great
   congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear
him.
26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise
the LORD.
   May your hearts live forever!
27 All the ends of the earth shall remember
   and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations shall
worship before him.
28 For dominion belongs to the LORD,
   and he rules over the nations.
29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the
   earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to
the dust, and I shall live for him.
30 Posterity will serve him; future
generations will be told about the Lord,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people
yet unborn, saying that he has done it.
4. Yes, neither Jesus nor the Psalmist end in despair but they reclaim their faith and move on.

5. And that is what those words inspire me to do – knowing that Jesus last words recorded by Luke were “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

E. Finally, it reminds me that in the worst of times, God has not abandoned me, but is with me.

1. This, I believe, is what allowed Jesus to reclaim that faith; it was knowing that as God suffered in Jesus, God also suffers with me. But beyond the suffering, God also inspires me to lift up my eyes to the hills and ask “From where will my help come? And to hear the mountains respond – “Help comes from the HOLY ONE, who made heaven and earth.” AMEN.