

Alone.

Jesus was alone. Tried and convicted in a mockery of a religious trial. Found innocent by the Roman ruler yet still condemned to die. Alone, Jesus faced death.

Soon after the palms which marked the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem had wilted, after the garments spread before him upon the street were picked up, the crowds left Jesus alone. The joy, marked by loud hosannas, marked by crowds declaring that "This is the day that the Lord has made!" has disappeared. What happened to the joy, to the victory, to the confident celebration? What happened to the crowds of people?

Some probably were only there because they had been caught up in the excitement. They never really believed that this was the Messiah. However, they joined their voices to those around them because it seemed the right thing to do.

Others decided that this couldn't possibly be the Messiah, the anointed one of God. Yes, he had done great things: healings and miraculous feedings. But he just didn't act like a Messiah ought to act.

A few thought hard about what he taught. Yes, he knew Scripture, gave voice to it with an authority unmatched by other teachers. But, there were things that he taught that were just plain too hard to accept. The new meaning he gave the words demanded too much. No longer could one be confident that they were pleasing God by carefully following the rules. Jesus wanted your heart as well.

Not all of the crowd had left. Some were still present but had actually turned against Jesus. For monetary reward or because of the fear of change, some of the crowd were now demanding the release of Barabbas, an evil brigand who deserved death. Let Jesus die instead.

Have we, the crowd, left Jesus alone as well? Perhaps we could not sustain the emotional excitement of Palm Sunday. Perhaps Jesus has asked too much of us. Have we been offered a more attractive, an easier, alternative? Have we faded away, leaving Jesus alone, or even turned upon him?

Know this: Jesus still calls to us, still lovingly seeks even the crowd which deserted him. It is for people as fickle as the crowd, as fickle as we are, that Jesus came, that Jesus willingly died. Jesus is calling to you and to me, inviting us to recapture the joy, the victory of Palm Sunday.

Take a moment of silence. Ask yourself if you have been part of the crowd that turned away, if you have left Jesus alone. Is there something about Jesus that you have found too hard to accept? Is there something that the world offers which is too attractive to pass up, yet causes you to drift away from Jesus?

If there is something that worries you about your relationship with Jesus, something that has caused you to leave Jesus alone, write it upon one of the cards. Take this opportunity to be pray for what has caused you to stray.

Then offer a prayer of thanksgiving that God still welcomes all of us back, even

those who have left Jesus alone. God still lovingly calls for us to return, always part of God's people, fully forgiven. Be thankful that God always wants us to be part of God's people.

Alone.

Jesus was alone. On a cross, alone. Deserted by his disciples. Then laid into the tomb, alone.

Just before he died, Matthew tells us that Jesus called out: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” How alone can someone be? It was as if even God had turned his back.

Yet, look again at the Psalm we have just read. It starts: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Then, even in the midst of feeling alone, surrounded by enemies, forsaken by God, the Psalmist starts to praise God, to call God “My God,” to acknowledge God's presence from before the Psalmist was born, throughout life. The Psalmist declares that it is “My God” who has left him alone to face enemies who are circling like dogs. Even after expressing his anger at being being left alone by God, the Psalm-singer then calls upon the Lord, praises God. Even in the darkest moments of life, the Psalmist knows God is present, knows that God is in control, knows that God hears the pleas of the faithful.

We face many times in our lives when we might feel forsaken by God: alone, when illness or death or other calamity is near at hand. Let us follow the lead of Jesus as he quotes from the Psalmist. Let us, even in the midst of feeling alone, separated from God, break into a song of praise. Let us look beyond the times when we have felt alone and acknowledge that God is always present.

We might feel as if we have crossed some invisible line or that we have created some type of barrier, that causes us to feel alone, apart from God. It might be something that has happened to us that we can not believe that God could possibly have allowed. It might be something we have done that is so bad that God should forsake us.

But know this: there is no place that we can go and be apart from God. There is no place that God is not present with us. There is nothing we can do to separate ourselves from the love of God. We are never left without God, even at the cross, we have the certain knowledge that Resurrection Sunday is coming.

Is there something in your life which most makes you feel alone, isolated from God? As if you have been forsaken? On another card, write what makes you feel alone, set apart from God.

Then, come forward, place your cards at the foot of the cross. We will not read them, but we will pray for these concerns. It is because of the cross that we know that we are forgiven. It is because of the cross that we know that we are not alone.