

Community Church of Issaquah

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When God Seems Lost

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Like most of you, the Easter holidays have a somewhat earthly meaning to me. Even as an older –maybe not so mature – adult, I find myself focusing on Easter Eggs, Easter Baskets, candy, lots of candy, bunny rabbits, little baby chicks, and getting some new clothes called an Easter outfit. Oh, and did I say chocolate candy? I recall going to church when I was younger where everyone was all dressed up and even some women wore hats and gloves. Did you ever see that? And do you remember going on an Easter Egg Hunt? I never found the good eggs, by the way. Do you remember dying Easter Eggs with all sorts of colors and patterns? That's what I mean by Easter having an earthly meaning. For years I lost sight of the real meaning on what Easter means.

It is true that the Easter observance was a human creation designed to coincide with the first full moon of Spring, more a celebration of new life than the death and resurrection of Jesus. When I try to wrap my head around that, I can't help but think about what Easter really should mean to believers. I don't mean to dismiss the beautiful parts of the holiday that we experience and see. I love that! I really miss our Easter family dinner – the ham, the green bean casserole, the deviled eggs and all that. But for just a few minutes, let's think about a different kind of observance.

Do you ever think about what life was like for people during the days of Jesus. The Israelites were under the rule of the Roman empire. They had few freedoms and suffered persecution daily. Their religious leaders of the Sanhedrin were divided into the Sadducees and the Pharisees. One group believed in the resurrection of the spirit or soul, the other couldn't believe such a thing. Jews in that day were seemingly hopeless. For generations they had been promised a messiah. Priests and prophets had told them over and over that God would come and rescue them. God would send a Son to lead them out of darkness and into a new light.

Can you put yourself in their place? If I were there, I would be asking myself and anyone else, "Where is God!?" The prophets told us that God would send us a messiah, the promised one. So where is he? Can you hear the people of Jerusalem saying, "Where is God now that we need him?" And no one seemed to have an answer to that question. Then things changed. Rumors spread wildly about some man named Jesus from Nazareth who had the magical powers to heal the sick, the blind, the lame and even raise people from the dead. And he claimed to be the son of God.

Crowds of people began to follow him and listen to him as he taught them about God's love and promises. Some became avid believers and held onto the possibility that this man might truly be the Messiah that was promised by the prophets long ago. Hopes were high that finally someone would come and free them from servitude and

oppression. But the voices of the priests and leaders of the Sanhedrin were loud in opposition, denying that this earthly human could possibly be the Son of God. And then the worst became a reality, this Jesus person was tried and then crucified. He seemed to have left them without any hope.

I imagine there was a chorus of voices crying, “Where is God?” or more likely, “Where is God when we need him?” It’s difficult for us here more than 2000 years after all this happened to wrap our heads around the despair and hopelessness that these confused Israelites were experiencing. They prayed hard for a miracle but could not find the words to make their prayers real. It’s not that we haven’t ever been in a situation where we have asked, “Where is God?” Sure, our lives are nothing like these early followers of Christ, but even so, life has its challenges for us, too.

You and I are different. We know the ending to the story. We don’t wonder where God is or what happened to the Messiah, Jesus. We know. God sacrificed his only son so that we – all of us – might have forgiveness and eternal life. Those who were following Jesus thought it was all over when he was placed in the tomb and their hopes were dimmed. But you and I know the rest of the story. We know that the stone was rolled away from his tomb, the women who came to cleanse him for burials found it empty, and his disciples were met face to face with the risen Christ – resurrected from the dead back to life.

As we approach Easter, we don't have the same problem of finding the right prayers or words of hope in what seemed like a hopeless world. When Paul wrote these words to the believers in Rome, he was attempting to open a new door for the believers who thought God had left them. The Apostle Paul tells us in these verses in Romans that we can be sure that even when we don't know how to pray or what to pray for, God's Holy Spirit will do it for us. I suppose we could call that God's working behind the scene. "For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit Himself pleads with God for us in words we cannot express."

Do you see the difference in where we are today awaiting Easter and where the early followers of Christ were? There might not be a reason for us to ask, "Where is God?" because we know where he is. We heard it read to us in the Scripture passages today. More than likely, we feel sorry for those Israelites in search of hope, but we don't really identify with them. We know the full story and the outcome. Thank you, God. I won't ask God "Where are you?" at this Easter time. I know that. But there are times when each of us have asked "Where is God?"

There are the followers asking questions you and I have asked in the past. What happened? What are we supposed to do next? How am I supposed to pray about this? And the haunting question, Where is God now? We are blessed that in our Easter season, that's not usually the long list of questions we are asking. But we know the answers to all those questions. We're more likely to ask, Who hid the eggs? Where's my Easter basket with my treats? What time is dinner? Where'd you get that outfit?

You know, the important things about Easter. There would need to be some very serious circumstances in our lives to put us into that depth of uncertainty. It difficult for us to put ourselves in the sandals of those feeling the loss of their messiah and the hope of being free.

They followed him into Jerusalem as he rode into the city his last time. Life seemed so upbeat and positive. They were literally shouting his name and believing that he was indeed the new king that would come and free them. A week after that parade, he was dead and their hopes were dashed. Now what were they supposed to do? I can imagine that they wanted to pray, but what were they to pray for? What had happened to the closeness they had felt to God by believing his son was there to rescue them.

It is very different for us as believers who celebrate the resurrection as our gift from God to show his presence in our lives. There is not often a sense of disconnectedness or a straining on our part to find God's presence in our lives. It ranges from the simple, "Where should I go to church?" to the complex "How should I plan for the future and how will we pay for it?" We wait for instruction or guidance, we wait for answers. And in that time of silence, we might not sense God's presence. But in our hearts we know he is there. Christians are more the microwave religious family who want answers and we want them immediately. It would be wise for each of us to memorize the verse here that simply says, "Who then can separate us from the love of God?" The answer to that is a resounding 'no one' and 'no thing.' That promise will come in handy on those days

when we are feeling disconnected and cannot sense God's response to our need.

The need for the followers of Jesus in his day was hope, to find something to hold onto. When they attempted to pray, there was a lack of finding direction or help. It might seem strange for us as we enter the final days before Easter and the Holy Week to be comparing ourselves to those early believers. But in truth, we are often in the same predicament as they – wondering how to pray and what to ask God for. That is not to take away from the joyful and lighthearted celebration we'll be having soon. It's a reminder that all of us who choose to follow Christ might come to a place where we, like the Israelites, would ask, "Where is God?"

The best answer to that question is one that will come when we remember that no one and no thing can ever separate us from the love of God. If I could have been there to answer the believers who thought their hope was dead and were weeping, "Where is God?" I would have said, He's right here. And I will tell you the same thing. God is right here. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, God's grace and love will raise our spirits from a dark place or a feeling of loss or hopelessness. Even Christ from the cross called out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It was his way of saying, "Where is God?" And the answer came quickly. "There is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God."

Where is God? He's right here. At Easter and every day.