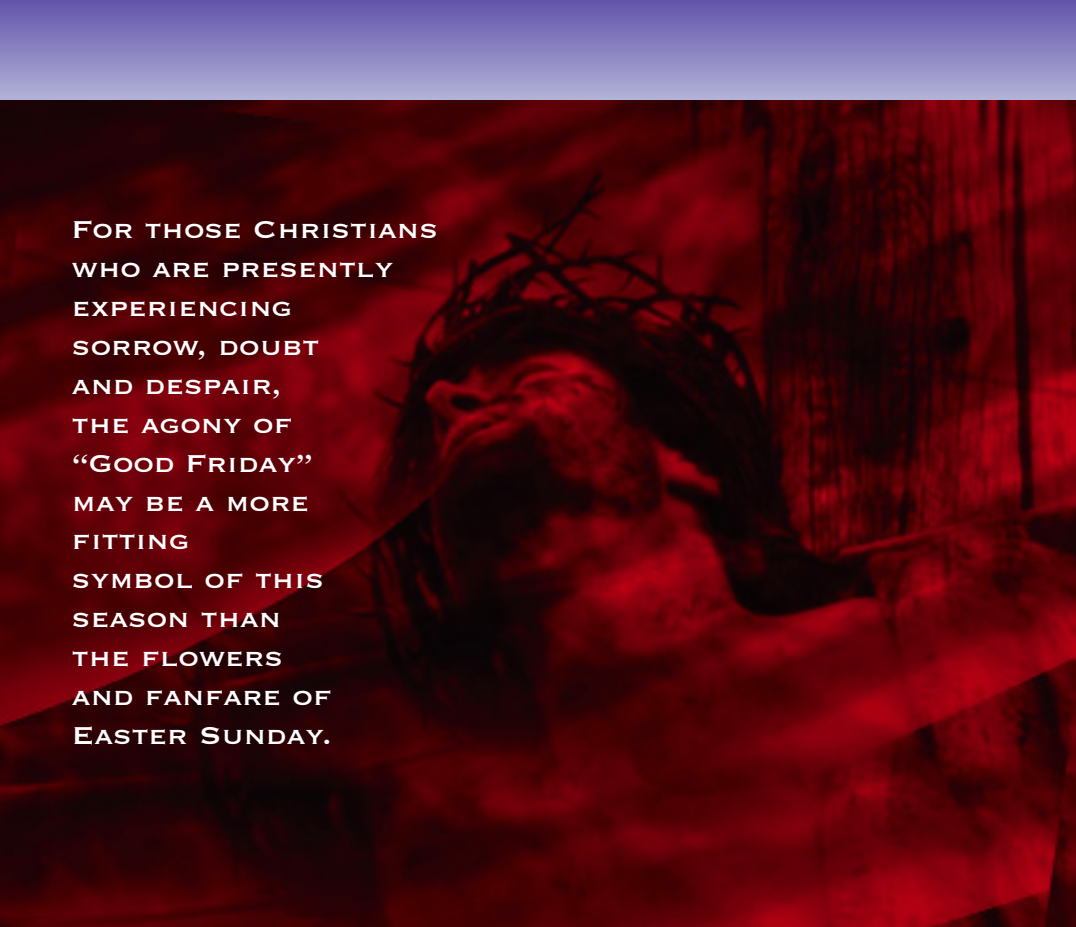


BY MARTIN M. DAVIS



FEELING FORSAKEN

Easter is the time of year when Christians throughout the world celebrate the central event of our faith and the foundation of hope for our lives: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet while Easter Sunday is rightly a time of celebration and joy, it is preceded by an event that occurred amidst great sorrow, doubt and despair: the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on a cruel Roman cross. For those Christians who are presently experiencing sorrow, doubt and despair, the agony of “Good Friday” may be a more fitting symbol of this season than the flowers and fanfare of Easter Sunday. To be sure, in the face of the inevitable



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...THE CENTRAL THEME OF OUR FAITH IS BOTH RESURRECTION AND GLORY, AS WELL AS THE CROSS. BUT WE MUST GO THROUGH THE PAIN BEFORE WE REACH THE GLORY. THAT IS THE NATURE OF OUR FAITH; THAT IS THE JOURNEY TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED.

difficulties that life brings, there are times in our lives when we feel alone, forsaken and even abandoned by God.

Our Faith Begins With Darkness

During this Easter time, we might pause to remember that Christianity has its roots in a moment of supreme darkness, as Christ hung dying on the brutal cross of Calvary. In that horrible, humiliating scene, God appeared totally absent. How could such a despicable event have occurred if God were involved? Surely the heavenly Father must have seemed far away when Jesus uttered his cry of dereliction, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Without doubt, those disciples who witnessed Jesus’ last gasp of breath on that fateful Friday descended into the depths of despair

as their hopes and dreams for the immediate restoration of the Messianic kingdom were dashed to the ground and crushed underfoot by the oppressive Roman government. Like their crucified friend and leader, they, too, must have felt forsaken by God.

Like Jesus, and like those first Christians who witnessed his merciless and agonizing death on the cross at Calvary, we, too, may feel forsaken by God. This at times overwhelming sense of abandonment contributes heavily to the pain and longing that sometimes characterize the life of faith, for there can be much pain and longing in faith. Although by the exer-

cise of faith, belief and trust may become easier, the life of faith is not always easy. Well-meaning friends tell us, “Just trust the Lord, and everything will be all right.” To be sure, they are correct in what they say; but the glib manner in which such words are often spoken denies or overlooks the pain, anguish and uncertainty that sometimes accompany the life of faith. To trust God is right; yet, it is also right to admit that such trust is not always easy or casual. Though trust is never blind, it is, nonetheless, trust in something unseen, and it can be very tenuous and unsure.

Looking for Signs of Hope

Many of our days lack what may seem on other, brighter days to be clear evidence that we are on the path God intends us to travel. To be sure, there are occasional signs along the way—usually small ones that have meaning only to us and those closest to us—that enliven us with hope and reassure us that we are traveling the divinely appointed path.

The distance between even these small, intimate signs, however, is often so great that we grow increasingly hungry and thirsty as we journey from signpost to signpost. Like those who struggle for breath, we feel aching deep within our chests. We gasp—we ask God to infuse us with life-giving hope, some symbolic token of the divine presence in our lives. “Anything God,” we plead, “just give me some kind of sign that I am doing what you want me to do. Please let me know that you are with me, God!” The more honest among us will admit that in these painful and uncertain times, doubt is a familiar companion on our journeys.

TODAY MAY FIND US LIVING IN DARKNESS AND OBSCURITY, THE GROUND UNCERTAIN BENEATH OUR FEET, JUST AS ON THE DAY OF CHRIST’S DEATH.

So often God remains distant and aloof, or so it seems from our very limited viewpoint. "Why won't you answer, God?" our pleading goes on. "Where are you? Why won't you show the way?" While we long to travel in the brightness of the divine presence, instead, we grope in the darkness of unknowing, as often as not un-

is the journey to which we are called. Such is the anguish of living by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

We travel the way of the cross—the way of the pain, agony and despair—always with the hope nested in faith that the road that leads past the cross is also the road that continues to the glory. With the

ground uncertain beneath our feet, just as on the day of Christ's death.

Today, the weight of the pain of a broken relationship may nearly crush us; the habitual use of alcohol or drugs may imprison us; an obsession with a person or thing may torment us; the loss of a loved one may shred the fabric of our

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certain that we are traveling in the right direction. We hurt, we cry out, yet God seems to remain distant. The divine messenger bearing the waxed and sealed orders of the king does not appear.

The Core of Our Faith

Yet, herein we come again to the central message of Christianity, for the central theme of our faith is both resurrection and glory, as well as the cross. We must go through the pain before we reach the glory. That is the nature of our faith; that

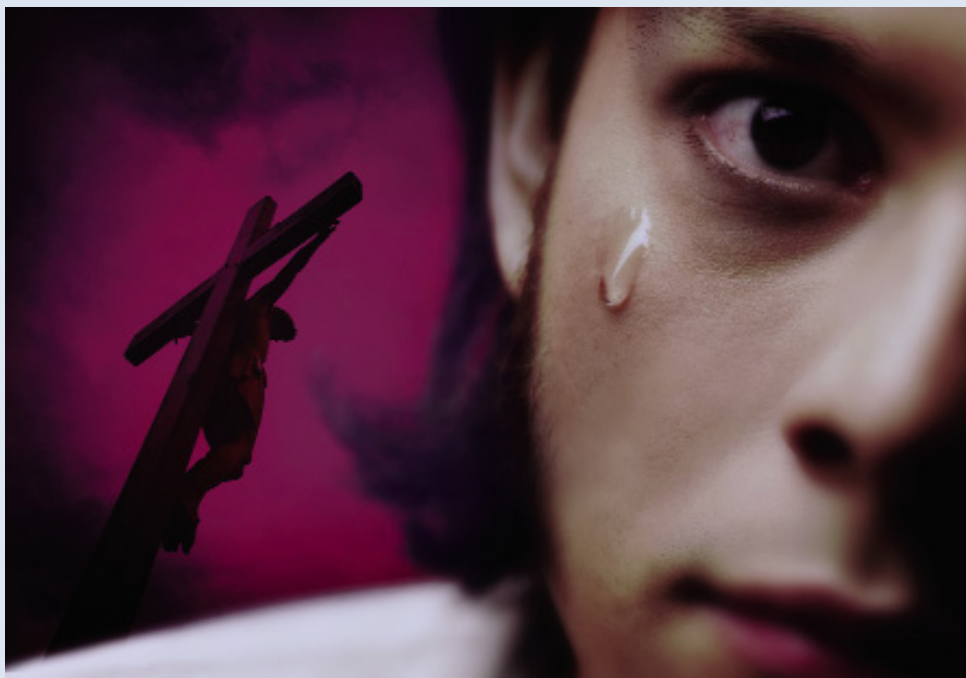
apostle Paul, we tenaciously cling to the belief that the sufferings of this present life "are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

"It's Friday—But Sunday's Comin'!"

This Easter season may find us in despair. Like Jesus nailed in agony to the cross on that bleak Friday two thousand years ago, we may wonder why God seemingly has forsaken us. Today may find us living in darkness and obscurity, the

souls; failing health or the ruin of a career may leave us in despair; and for many others, the poor choices and mistakes of the past may haunt us. But our despair, suffering and pain—like the crucifixion—must always be viewed in the light of the following resurrection, vindication and glory.

In the eloquent words of Alister McGrath: "The transformation of that darkness into light, as Good Friday gave way to Easter Day, constitutes the basis of the Christian hope—that the dark night of faith will finally give way to the dawn of the resurrection life. But in the meantime we struggle on in the twilight world of faith."¹ Or, in the immortal words of Tony Compolo, "It's Friday, but Sunday's comin'!"²



THIS EASTER SEASON MAY FIND US IN DESPAIR... BUT OUR DESPAIR, SUFFERING AND PAIN—LIKE THE CRUCIFIXION—MUST ALWAYS BE VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF THE FOLLOWING RESURRECTION, VINDICATION AND GLORY.

Adapted from Ashes into Gold: The Journey of Spirituality, by Martin M. Davis (Enumclaw, WA: WinePress Publishing, 2004).

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *The Mystery of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books/Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 105.

² Tony Compolo, *It's Friday, But Sunday's Comin'* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1984), 120.

Martin M. Davis, is an author, retired family therapist and ordained minister in All Nations Anglican Church. To learn more about his book, Ashes Into Gold: The Journey of Spirituality, you can visit his website at www.mannabooks.org. To see his blog on Trinitarian theology visit www.martindavis.blogspot.com.