

REV. GREGORY DELL

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI? – MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"

"Rev. Dell, a question..." My interrogator was a reporter for the Chicago Tribune. "Rev. Dell, you have been a very active pastor for over 40 years. Some of your endeavors have invited uncomfortable debate, while others have been risky and even dangerous. Yet despite the difficult personal consequences of some of these activities, your faith in God has remained unshaken. There are those who wonder if that faithfulness is unshaken *now*."

The occasion for that reporter's question was a newspaper article the day before, reporting that I had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, which is incurable, unpredictable, and progressive. Though it is not terminal in itself, the doctors told me that people die from the complications because of the neural and muscular havoc it causes. Not exactly good news.

There is the temptation to fall into despair when we experience the "not exactly good news" in our lives. This can be when we endure the anguish of broken relationships among our friends and family, or when we become increasingly aware of the tremendous power that evil, hatred, violence, and bigotry work in our world. It is *then* that we are called to remember that desperate and anguished cry of Christ as he hung on the cross. Though most of *us* will not experience anything like what Jesus experienced, there are times when we too wonder if we and our world have been "forsaken" by God.

In those times we come to a discovery. We discover that God understands despair because God has been there. We are free to cry out "*My God why have you forsaken me?*" – because Christ showed us the way. We don't need to run away or pretend that everything is okay when it is not. God is there, entering the pain and waiting – waiting for the moment when the anguish and despair can be conquered by the power of the resurrection. That moment will come for us as it did for Christ. But in Holy Week we are shown that the way of Christ claims doubt, anger, deep grief and cries of pain – claims it because we know the story doesn't end there. In fear and trembling, we dare to take the next step that will lead us through the crucifixion on to the resurrection. But this night we claim our doubt and pain, our fear and trembling, and move on to the cross and then ultimately to the empty tomb.

Gregory Dell