When I was in second grade, I had my tonsils out.  They lure you into it by promising lots of ice cream and ginger ale.  I remember a little of the experience - that was when they used ether - I don’t think I’ll ever forget that smell.  And I remember the room I was in. It was a ward kind of thing with about 6 other kids. We probably all were in for tonsils.  We spent one night there and then were to go home the next day. One by one the other children in the ward were carted away by their parents.  Soon I was the only one left. Alone. Apart. I don’t know how long I held off, but soon I became hysterical. My mother had forgotten me - that was clear.  I sat in that empty ward crying my eyes out. Forsaken. When she finally showed up I was inconsolable - we weren’t an affectionate family - which now I bemoan - how wonderful it would have been had she hugged and soothed me, but at least she claimed me and took me home.  She’d been given a pick up time of 2:00 and that was when she came!

Did I think my mother had really forgotten me?  Would she never do the laundry and wonder who these pink days of the week underwear belonged to?  I don’t know what I thought, I only know what I felt. Forsaken. Alone in a big room, every footstep in the hall listened to with hope, trying to swallow with that sore throat - I was terrified and in pain.  Forsaken. I wish I could have recited the 23 psalm and calmed myself down, reassured myself that I was not alone. But all I had in my 7 year old brain was Jesus Loves Me and Now I lay Me down to sleep. Neither of them came to me.  Did I think I was never going home? I wasn’t thinking at all - I was feeling - forsaken.

Jesus hanging on the cross - flanked by criminals, his mother at his feet; the time moving slowly and his body slumps; he can no longer see those gathered there in love.  Separated. Alone. Forsaken.

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

Just minutes before he joined his disciple and his mother in a new family.  Just minutes before this he felt God’s strength strongly enough to promise paradise to the criminal on his right.  The criminals now also slumped, heads buried in their chests; separate, each of the three alone; forsaken.

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

Just an hour before, Jesus called on his father to forgive what had brought him to this ending.  Just an hour before, Jesus and God were one; forgiving. Now, that is forgotten. The pressure on his lungs blurs any memory of a stronger body; the pull at the skin of his hands is the only distraction from the weight of his body.  Forsaken, for sure.

Yet still, Jesus cries to the God he thinks won’t answer?  Yet still he uses words from the bible to cry out. My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?  He speaks the 22nd psalm. He knows these words have been spoken countless times. That others have felt this. It is not new, not novel.  Forsaken. This feeling is true. He feels it. Forsaken. The feeling is real. The reality is the opposite.

In less than an hour, all feeling will be gone.  In less than an hour, forsaken is exposed as an illusion.  His father’s hands are the reality; the truth; the resting place.

My God, My God, why have you forsaken us?

Four weeks ago, we passed the peace, hugging, touching, jostling up against one another.  Four weeks ago, we heard the word, Coronavirus; we sympathized with the other side of the earth.  We went out to dinner - together. Three weeks ago we bumped elbows and bowed to one another as if it were a game.  Three weeks ago, community meant together; face to face - even if 6 feet apart. Together.

Two weeks ago, we stopped seeing each other.  An elbow bump seemed too close. Two weeks ago, we said goodbye to Northern Italy for an unknown length of time.  Two weeks ago, we decided to be apart. Separate. Two weeks ago, countries on the map of the world were designated by numbers of cases; numbers of deaths.  Two weeks ago, our children came home from school and stayed there - apart. Separate, apart. My God, My God, why have you forsaken us?

One week ago, we went for groceries and found  empty shelves. Forsaken. We saw pictures of Paris - empty cafes, no cars, no people.  Is a city without people still a city? One week ago, we went home and we stayed there. Apart. Together. Separate. One week ago, we gathered in a new way. We blessed two babies who will have stories about their baptisms.

One week ago, we felt fear; we looked at the number dotted map and shook our heads - together, apart.  One week ago, people in our own towns fell sick. Apart. Afraid. Forsaken?

This week we saw pictures of Times Square and the Chicago Loop empty of people - forsaken.  This week we stayed home, again. We discovered Zoom - together. Through Zoom we are together.  And Apart. All. This week we started not to expect the end. We asked questions. Forsaken? This week people in our town died.  This week we don’t know what the world is like. We are newborns. Afraid. Alive.

Today we are together apart.  Today we know how much we love each other; today we know how much we need each other.  My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? My God - have you forsaken us? O God - you have awakened us?  Today, we too are in your hands - together, apart, afraid, ALIVE. Today is the moment when we are so vulnerable that God is the only place we can turn. Today we so yearn for God’s presence that our fear makes God’s absence seem real.   But today we move from the words of psalm 22 - My God, My God, why have you forsaken me to the words of the next psalm. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. I fear no evil for you are with me. Unshaken. Awakened. Apart. Together.  The Lord is your shepherd. You shall not want.