

I had a funeral yesterday, I don't know if any of you knew the man or not, Robert Underwood. I know the man not at all. A drunk, some people told me. A drifter his family said. Certainly unchurched though he had been baptized as a child.

I interned under a pastor who had a policy about such funerals. If they didn't want to come into the church while they were living, I'm not going to bring them in here when they're dead, he said. Maybe he was right, if a man doesn't want to listen to a preacher all the days of his living, why should it be a preacher who speaks the last public words over his corpse. But that was my internship supervisor. Others would say that such a man\* doesn't deserve a church funeral. Not good enough. Or hadn't paid ~~the~~ dues which is what some people think they are doing when they put up with an hour of worship each week.

Me, I feel kind of angry when I first get the call. My week was busy enough, I'm tired, if it were someone I at least knew, but this total stranger, killed when his cigarette shoulders and burns the couch he is lying on, what will I say about this man <sup>for</sup> whom not even his family would not say much positive, but that he was helpful around the house. Why did they have to want <sup>Mattings</sup> Lutheran anyway, why not the Hutterian's over at the congregational church, why not Peter Ramseth in Bucyrus. They lived close to his Richland Church.

But I talk with his sister on the phone, she sounds quite sad, someone has to do the funeral, it might as well be me. I ask if he is baptized, at least I can talk about what God's intentions for this man were.

Now the funeral is come and gone, I said what I hoped would be appropriate, I hope I have spoken the truth of God. But today we read a nother truth about this man. That cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Surely Robert Underland must seem God forsaken, he had three children, his wife left him, took the kids, though he searched he never found them, never saw them again. Just the day he died, twenty-five, thirty years after she left they tell me he talked about those kids, wanted to see them again. Married <sup>his wife</sup> again, ~~he~~ died. He drank too much, probably was drunk when he died. A very sad man, a drifter his family would say of him. Shattered his leg four years ago in a fall I guess, he'd been in and out of VA hospitals ever since.

God forsaken. Probably did most of his praying in cursing, who knows. He'll be little

mis sed by this world, God forsake n.

I suspect that I little understand such a man. Jesus does though. Jesus knows what God forsaken is.

That is the most offensive thing of all about this Christian faith, Jesus was God forsaken. Cried out on that cross, inviting every Godforsaken one to himself. Mercy for the ungodly,  
the god forsaken

~~know that there is a much hope for them as the thing that Jesus as their is~~

<sup>truly</sup>  
That is all that we know of Jesus, his mercy, his help for those who have no help in themselves. People like Robert Underland, and if we knew the truth, like me and you, Jesus  
God forsaken. \*\*\*\*

I remember a conversation of young seminary students. The question, when we get out there in the parish, what is the message we will proclaim? And one answered, "I am the message. By my love, my concern, I will show them God." Maybe he is able, but when the funeral for a Robert Underland comes along, I want to run away, have nothing to do with it. The God forsaken I want nothing to do with. But Jesus runs to embrace them.

Jesus is the message. Amen.