

## THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF JESUS

[PASTOR] THE FIRST WORD

Luke 23:33-34

When they came to the place called "The Skull", they nailed Jesus to the cross there, and the two criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Jesus said "Forgive them, Father! They do not know what they are doing."

\* Meditation on the First Word

"They do not know what they are doing"  
They do not know? They ...who killed Jesus?  
Who is "they"?

It is so easy to name others  
to blame others  
the Romans  
the crowd  
Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas  
they all played their part  
and conspired against Jesus  
or simply followed orders to maintain the peace  
to keep Jesus' kingdom from infringing on theirs.

And yet where are we when Jesus' kingdom infringes on ours?  
on our peace and our order?  
on our prosperity and our security?

Where are we when the victims of our peace cry for justice?  
when those disenfranchised by our order call for compassion?  
when the hungry and the lonely beg us to share our prosperity  
our security  
our power?

Where are we when Christ is crucified among us?

Surely he should have raged  
at the sinners who nailed him to the tree.  
Surely he should have raged at us for the evil we do,

the evil we do both knowing and unknowing,  
Yet compassion is there in the first words that he utters  
He intercedes for us before the Father.

Compassion that called him into being in his mother's womb  
Compassion that compelled him to the cross  
Compassion that brings incredible, unbelievable grace  
Compassion that echoes through the centuries  
to all who participate in the killing of Christ:  
Compassion that cries out from the cross:  
"Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing"

### [KARYN] THE SECOND WORD

Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals hanging there threw insults at him:  
"Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" The other  
one, however, rebuked him, saying: "Don't you fear God? Here  
we are all under the same sentence. Ours, however, is only  
right, for we are getting what we deserve for what we did;  
but he has done no wrong." And he said to Jesus, "Remember  
me, Jesus, when you come as King!" Jesus said to him, "I  
tell you this: Today you will be in Paradise with me."

#### \* Meditation on The Second Word

How much are we like the first thief?

Full of anger - because we are not rescued from our sin?

Full of hate - because we suffer because of the sins of others?

How much do we want God to snap his fingers

And make right what we have made wrong?

What we have allowed others to make wrong?

How easy it is to cry "save us"

and to rail against God

when there is no magic cure

no miraculous recovery

no legions of angels

to take away pain and bring wholeness.

How easy it is to scorn the Messiah,  
to mock the goodness of the world  
and condemn the light of the world  
because we are unwilling to face what we we have done?

Yet there is goodness  
There is a cure for sin  
a cure that does not promise magical solutions  
but promises that the pain of sin is not the end,  
that when all this is over  
when the suffering is finished  
that the final word is not torture and defeat  
but life -- life springing out of the ashes  
life transformed and fulfilled in Paradise.

To the compassionate thief  
To the one who could still recognize the good in the world  
To the one who tried to comfort and protect that good  
To the one who sought good -- Comfort was given

"Today, you will be in paradise with me."

### [WILL]THE THIRD WORD

John 19:25-27

Standing close to Jesus' cross were his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there; so he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that time the disciple took her to live in his home.

#### \* Meditation on the Third Word

Who can grasp the grief?  
the grief of Mary watching her son suffer?  
the grief of Mary watching him die?

And who can grasp the grief of the son?  
The son who must see his mother mourn?

What gift can a man give his mother?  
What can he offer when he is gone?  
How can he help her?  
Hold her?  
Comfort her?  
Honour her?

"Woman, here is your son"

Here is one I love, to love you, and for you to love.  
One who knows me  
One who is my brother and who can speak of me.  
One Who can hold you,  
    comfort you,  
    and honour you;  
One who shares your grief

"Here is your mother"

Here is one I love, for you to love, and to love you.  
The one who taught me,  
the one who fed me,  
the one who wiped away my tears  
the one who hugged me,  
the one who grieves with you.

Women, behold your children; children, behold your mothers.

[PASTOR] THE FOURTH WORD

Mark 15:33-34

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Elo-i, elo-i, lama sabach-thani?" which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

\* Meditation on the Fourth Word

Of all the agony of that tortuous day  
the lacerations of the scourging  
the chafing of the thorns around his head  
the convulsions of his tormented, dehydrated body  
as it hung in the heat all the day  
Nothing reaches the depth of this anguished cry of desolation  
"My God, my god, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Jesus, who found his purpose and strength in the presence of God  
who was sustained by the immediacy of his relationship with God  
and who endured all by the tangible power of God always at work  
within him ,  
always a centre of vitality and peace,  
found himself totally alone on the cross.

Jesus, whose very being was God,  
found himself utterly,  
    absolutely,  
    despairingly.  
cut off from all that gives life and breath  
cut off from all that gives purpose and hope  
cut off from the source of his being  
cut off, even from himself  
plumbing the depths of the human condition  
to walk in the place of the utter absence of God,  
in the place of sinners  
in the place of those who reject God.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

In these words is the central mystery of the crucifixion  
which cannot be fully comprehended,  
that there is no despair so deep  
or evil so overwhelming  
or place so far removed from joy, light, and love  
from the very heart of God  
that God has not been before us,  
and where God cannot meet us  
and bring us home.

[KARYN] THE FIFTH WORD

John 19:28

After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said  
(to fulfil the scripture), "I thirst."

\* Meditation on the Fifth Word

There is a kind of timelessness about hanging on a cross.

It is not a quiet death,

over in an instant in one glorious moment of martyrdom  
like being torn apart by lions.

A cross is as much an instrument of torture  
as it is a gallows from which to hang,

And as the day wears on

seconds stretch into minutes which stretch into hours

until there comes a point when time can no longer be measured  
except in the gradual weakening of the body

and its ever more insistent demands

for that substance which is so vital to life

so foundational to all living things

so basic to existence as we know it: -- water.

Water to moisten a parched mouth

Water to free a swollen tongue

Water to open a rasping throat that cannot gasp enough air.

Water to keep hope alive

to keep life alive just a few moments longer.

Water, to a crucified man, is life.

"O God, thou art my God, I seek thee,

my soul thirsts for thee;

my flesh faints for thee

as in a dry and weary land where no water is."

Who can tell if these words from Psalm 63 went through Jesus mind

but a thirst for water is a thirst for life

and a thirst for life is a thirst for God

who promises streams in the desert

mighty rivers in the dry land  
and living water to wash away every tear.

Here, at the end of it all those promises seem far away, -  
distant.

And yet Jesus - forsaken by God  
still clings to the memory and the hope of life.

"I thirst."

[RENATA] THE SIXTH WORD

John 19:29-30

A bowl was there, full of cheap wine mixed with vinegar, so  
a sponge was soaked in it, put on stalk of hyssop and lifted  
up to his lips. When Jesus had received the wine, he said,  
"It is finished";

\* Meditation on the Sixth Word

What a sigh of relief!  
What a cry of deliverance,  
that finally,  
after seemingly endless pain  
and gasping torment,  
it is over at last.  
The suffering is ended.  
The ordeal is finished  
and nothing remains  
but the blessed peace of the absence of all sensation.

When all there is, is pain  
its ceasing is the greatest blessing of all  
even when its ceasing comes only with death.

But Jesus' cry is more than just welcoming the ending of pain  
it is more than joy at the deliverance death brings.

He does not merely say, "it is over"  
he says, "it is accomplished,

fulfilled,  
achieved"

Jesus's cry isn't a cry of defeat and despair

It is a cry of success and triumph  
- even at the moment of death -  
that the race has been run  
that he has endured to the end  
that the strife is over  
and the battle is won.

Jesus' cry is a cry of relief to be sure  
but it is also a cry of victory:

"The work I came to do is complete"  
there is nothing more to add  
"it is finished"

[PASTOR] THE SEVENTH WORD

Luke 23:46

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

\* Meditation on the Seventh Word

It is the end, the very end  
the end of the ordeal  
the end of the suffering  
and Jesus  
alone on the cross  
tortured  
exhausted  
abandoned by his friends  
forsaken by God  
gasps for a last breath  
and gathers the strength for one final cry.

Why would he choose to speak  
so close to the end?  
Why would he muster the last energy he had  
to cry out with a loud voice?  
Couldn't God have heard his thoughts?

Unless God wasn't the only one intended to hear.  
Unless his voice was pitched loud  
so that we too might hear this final dedication of his soul.

A dedication made despite the pain,  
despite the mocking,  
despite the agony,  
despite the sense of horrible aloneness he felt.

A dedication made to God  
before the resurrection,  
before the victory of the kingdom,  
before any assurance other than that  
which faith could bring.

Jesus entrusts his spirit -- his life --  
and all that has given it meaning --  
to God in faith,  
even at the point of his own abandonment  
when the good seems so very far away  
he proclaims his faith in God,  
the darkness cannot overcome it.

"Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit"

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