

The Seven Last Words of Christ

A Devotional for Good Friday

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Compiled by

All Saints Anglican Church

And

Union Church

Prescott, AZ

The Seven Last Words

"Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

"This day you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)

"Woman, behold your son." (John 19:26-27)

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46)

"I thirst." (John 19:28)

"It is finished." (John 19:30)

"Into your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

1st - "Father Forgive them, they know not what they do."

Luke 23:34

Pastor Jon Wolfinger

Union Church

The first words we hear from the cross are that of forgiveness.

In the face of mocking, scoffing, and people actively dividing garments, Jesus asks for an undeserved gift. This speaks to the depth of the world's brokenness and the mercy our Savior is willing to grant.

The fractures are so deep, the chasm between a broken creation and its loving creator is so great that only the death of the son of God could bridge the gap.

The pardon Jesus requests isn't that the Father would merely sweep sin and its effects under a cosmic rug, but that Christ would pay the penalty we all deserve, and gift us his righteousness. As Paul tells the church in Corinth "For our sake, He became sin, who knew no sin, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God"

Through the events that take place at Calvary, sin is expunged AND relationship is repaired through faith in Jesus. The cross bridges the divide between a holy God and His wayward people. It cleanses and recreates community.

One author states "Forgiveness casts off the old self. Christian forgiveness is not primarily an absolution of guilt, but it is the restoration of community." Since forgiveness is offered, this Friday invites us again toward confession. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and cleanse us of all unrighteousness"

Fredrick Buechner writes "To confess your sins to God is not to tell God anything God doesn't already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. When you confess them, they become the bridge."

Then what happens? We are transformed. We are renewed. We are made whole.

As JC Ryle wrote 5 things that happen to a forgiven soul: #1: Forgiven Souls Hate Sin.#2: Forgiven Souls Love Christ.#3: Forgiven Souls Are Humble.#4: Forgiven Souls Are Holy.#5: Forgiven Souls Are Forgiving.

The first words we hear from the cross are that of forgiveness. He has the power to heal our wounds, repair our relationship with God and to bridge this gap by forgiving our sin.

1. Think about J.C. Ryle's words and how they are reflected in your life. Are there areas there that you need to grow?
2. Are there sins that you have been forgiven of, that this Good Friday you need to let go of?

2nd – “This day you will be with me in Paradise.”

Luke 23:43

*Reverend Ian Emile Dunn
All Saints Anglican Church*

The word “paradise” conjures in our minds lots of interesting imagery, some may think of endless beaches with blue ocean waters lapping up against it, others might imagine unending golf courses, or some place where all our delights are tickled. Yet, we know this is not what Christ is promising to the criminal on the cross. Instead, we know that the thief will be with Christ in heaven, and this is good and right, but there’s a deeper promise here.

The word paradise is almost never used in the New Testament – but it has this tone of something to do with a garden. Here – Christ is promising not simply to be in heaven, but an actual restoration, he is promising the thief that he will get to enjoy the way it was supposed to be before the fall, that he will get to enjoy true and full communion with God.

When we finally rest in Christ this is what we are promised, not that our worldly desires become fulfilled but that we are being restored towards a state as it was before the fall. As we know this is a long slow process, but that is ultimately our hope – a fully restored communion with God.

As we read the book of Revelation and reach the conclusion of it all, this is the final vision – not of a nirvana kind of bliss of the eastern and neo-eastern religions, but that we will finally, fully know God, and we will dwell in His house forever.

Even as Christ is dying on the cross, suffering incredible pain, he provides hope for the repentant criminal. We share in that hope, we know that when our lives come to an end, that we too can trust in that promise, we know that although we will die – it is in dying that in the final day “we will be raised” with Christ.

As we long to be together as churches, missing our friends and Christian brothers and sisters, we are reminded that this is but a fraction of our longing for eternity. During this time of being apart from the church – we are reminded how much we long for the day when sin no longer separates us from God or from each other.

Amidst the pandemic and on this Good Friday especially, our longing for eternity with Christ and with His body takes on special significance. We are never without hope, but rather we know that one day soon we will be together again, and then in eternity we know Christ perfectly and enjoy complete fellowship. Let us hold to the hope – that we too will be with Christ in paradise.

1. When you think of paradise, what do you think of? How is that changed in knowing eternal paradise means that we will be restored to how things should be?

4th - "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46

Reverend Ian Emile Dunn

All Saints Anglican Church

Most of us know when we hear Christ crying out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me," that is he quoting the 22nd second Psalm. As we read the first clause of that Psalm we are left with a stark picture:

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

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

After two verses of Lamenting – the Psalmist changes his focus and cries out to God:

Yet you are holy,

enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you our fathers trusted;

they trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried and were rescued;

in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

Amidst the suffering of Good Friday and the turmoil of our present age we are reminded that God is holy. It was God's holiness, faithfulness, and love that sent Christ to the son. It was Christ's obedient love of God-the-Father that kept him on the cross, and God's love for humanity in which He opened a way to perfect fellowship with Him.

Perhaps during this season you have been feeling as though God is far from you. One person pithily said that she felt "socially distant from her shepherd." Does this sentiment ring true for you today? Do you feel God's imminence as you pray, or do you feel as though he is far from you and the words of Christ on the cross feel a little too true?

First – please know that many are feeling confusion in this season, many are frustrated with the way life has turn out, many have cried out "why have you forsaken me? Why have you forsaken us?"

But also know – that God hears even that prayer – the one who is holy, and enthroned ripped open the temple curtain two thousand years ago, and through Christ invites even sinners like you and I to cry out to Him. God is Holy and good and in that goodness He hears our cries.

Today – and in this season, God has allowed for us to come to Him in lament, to search our hearts, to cry out to Him, and to cling to him all the more tightly. Whatever your prayer may be – whether they be filled with lament, or hope – our Lord God in heaven has not forsaken us, He is with us, and he is inviting us in to intimacy with Him.

1. Spend time through this next hour giving your concerns over to God and simply being quiet in His presence.
2. Is there anything holding you up from believing that God hears all our prayers?

5th – "I thirst."
John 19:28
Pastor Jon Wolfinger
Union Church

John 19:28-29, After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

"With all due respect to the religions of the world, there is no other story like the Christian story. The god who thunders, the god who persecutes and condemns, the god who wreaks vengeance - yes, we know this god from the caricatures. We know this god from the old paintings. We know this god from hearing continual references to "the Old Testament God." But this is not who God is. "The Old Testament God" is the one who has come down from his throne on high into the world of sinful human flesh and of his own free will and decision has come under his own judgment in order to deliver us from everlasting condemnation and bring us into eternal life. He has not required human sacrifice; he has himself become the human sacrifice. He has not turned us over and forsaken us; he was himself turned over and forsaken. This is what the Old Testament prophet Isaiah says: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed". From beginning to end, the Holy Scriptures testify that the predicament of fallen humanity is so serious, so grave, so irremediable from within, that nothing short of divine intervention can rectify it."

- Fleming Rutledge

Not only is this moment a fulfillment of scripture that finds its center in the story of Jesus, it is an invitation for us to find our filling in Christ.

In this moment we see deity and humanity in tandem. The God of the Bible came to the world of empty stomachs and dried up mouths, that he might satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst, both now and forever.

As a deer pants for water, so our souls long for God. Let that desire drive us to the one and only place where we can find the satisfaction we so desperately need.

Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we know we will always be able to find our fill at the fountain of living water when we come to him. As He promised us in Matthew's gospel "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

While we have little to offer but sour wine, he is always able and willing to satisfy the thirsty soul that comes to him.

1. Are you spiritually thirsty or hungry today? Take this time to cry out to Christ for satisfaction.

6th – "It is finished."

John 19:30

*Reverend Ian Emile Dunn
All Saints Anglican Church*

There's a video that I like to watch when I get discouraged. It is a recording of Elder D. J. Ward, an African American preacher who is preaching on the sufficiency of Christ. In this recording he perfectly captures the result of the cross, as it he leads up to it, he asks the questions, that perhaps we've all asked, perhaps when we are first coming to know Christ, or perhaps, in days of struggle.

Elder Ward asks – did Christ really do this? Did he really accomplish this? Is there a work that I must do to earn part of my salvation? The video climaxes with a strong reminder and answer to these questions: Jesus did do it! Excitedly, Ward proclaims: "He paid it all! He nailed (sin) to the cross! And I bear it no more!"

In these final moments of the crucifixion, the darkness of that day – we are reminded of the hope, we are reminded, that it is Christ and Christ alone that paid for all our sins.

Let us ponder this, in the moments before Christ gives up his last breath – he utters these incredible words: "it is finished." And what is finished? His call to obedience, even onto death, has been complete, where we have failed to be obedient – Christ was perfectly obedient, even in great pain.

His earthly ministry, it is complete, from which we learn what perfect obedience looks like, what godliness looks like, and to which God is given flesh and dwelt among us. In which we are given a great high priest who can perfectly sympathize with our pain, our anxiety, our loneliness, our fears, our insecurity, and our shame.

But friends, it is so much more than these things – in that moment, as Christ breath's his last – the death for salvation humanity – is finished, the wall of separation from between God and man has been destroyed.

Christ's declaration "it is finished" is an ongoing results because of this singular past event. The event is finished – but until Christ returns and into eternity for His people – the results of that single moment continue to effect the faithful's lives. In proclaiming – it is finished – Christ promises a security in Him that we cannot earn, that we do not deserve, but that continues to be a balm of comfort for us, until we too breath our last and are joined with him.

We have not earned, nor can we do anything to earn what Christ did on the cross – rather as Elder Ward stated "Christ paid it all!"

1. Are there ways in which you are trying to earn your salvation that you need to give up?
2. What comforts do you find in knowing that Christ paid it all? That your salvation rests in Him alone?

7th - "Into your hands I commit my spirit."

Luke 23:46

Pastor Jon Wolfinger and Reverend Ian Emile Dunn

Jon: We were talking just a few minutes ago about how this good Friday is a unique one for the both of us and at least for the last 100 years. We have churches doing what we can to remember the sacrifice that Jesus gave and paid on the cross but we're having to do it from places of isolation. Places in our homes, rather than gathering together as the body of Christ as a whole and I think there's something there's something in that that speaks to the isolation and the hunger that the cross is to cultivate in our hearts and our lives. That the in the uniqueness we might be able to taste a little bit more acutely what the cross is meant and how it actually works in the people God in the unique situation today.

Ian: Throughout this whole thing, I've kind of been thinking about how it is affecting our whole lives. We live in a very privileged time where we can get basically anything we need without a tremendous amount of hassle and suddenly there's restrictions on our lives and a sort of closed off feeling. And our minds are saying this isn't right and this isn't good.

We know from scripture that the world is fallen, that the good place, that paradise that we talked about in the beginning was lost. Yet, we don't always realize that in our cultural context. Suddenly within these moments we are seeing the brokenness of the world we live in. And we're longing simply to be back together, to be able to worship together, to be able to hug without people getting weird looks, and to be able to break the bread and drink the wine and communion.

For me at least, this time as all of a sudden piqued a realization that the longing I have to be with my brothers and sister in Christ is just a little taste of that longing I am called to have for eternity. And the joy that we will have when we do get back together, will be but a taste of that joy when we have perfect fellowship with God and with one another.

Jon: The good news we see this good Friday is because of Christ committing himself to the father, because the work is finished we have this hope and promise that we have life now and forever with him. And Lord willing soon with one another again. My hope and prayer for all of us watching us today, is that we would respond to the cross as the roman soldier did in Matthew 27:54: When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" That in this we would ponder anew who this son of God is and what it means to commit ourselves to Him.

Let us pray

Heavenly Father we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those at Union Church and All Saints that during this season of longing, and this Good Friday especially, that we would find our rest and hope in Christ, and in the hope that we have we would glorify you in all that we do, that the world would see this, and join with us in the anticipation that we have for an eternity with you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*