

*Seven  
Last Words  
of Christ*



Wilmore Anglican Church  
Good Friday Reflections



**“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing” (Luke 23:34)**

Growing up with a general contractor as a Father I had many opportunities to lend a hand on the job site. Mostly my time was spent picking up the trash and doing menial tasks my dad did not want to do anymore. And then there were the times that my dad would teach me a specific skill or even sometimes invite me to just “give it a go” and see if I can figure it out. On some occasions, I can remember messing up a specific task he had given me to do out of ignorance. I simply did not know what to do. And while I am grateful for the time he took to teach me these skills, as all of us can relate, his patience wore thin sometimes. I can think of a few times when I messed up and my father would say, “What do you think you are doing!?”

As we read through scripture and watch God’s people make numerous mistakes, we find it far too easy to think, “What do they think they are doing?” Maybe it’s the Israelites’ lack of faith in God after delivering them from the world’s greatest power. Creating an idol to be their god immediately after Yahweh performed some of His most amazing miracles. Maybe it’s King David who took as his own a woman married to one of his faithful soldiers and then made sure that man was killed to cover up his sin. Or Jonah who when told to go one direction turned and went the exact opposite way in defiance. He would then lament God’s mercy being shown to his enemies. And how many times do we read about those disciples and just scratch our heads in confusion at their lack of faith and silly questions?

But all this pales in comparison to the crowds that day. The religious faithful. God’s chosen people turned a blind eye to their Messiah. He did not fit their mold. He did not do what they wanted Him to do. He must be stopped. And so, we look at the cross where our Savior is hung to be killed. He has been betrayed by his

friends. Falsely accused. Mocked. Spat upon. Beaten. Stripped of his clothing and dignity. Abused. Nailed to a cross. And now a spectacle to be watched as He suffers His darkest hour. His own people standing by and watching. Waiting for this rebel to die. And what does He cry out? He does not cry out in exasperation, “WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING!?” He cries out, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Our sin blinds us. Causes us to be ignorant and self-focused. As Augustine declared, “homo incurvatus in se” -- “sin is the human being curved in on itself.” This curvature to self-focus blinds us to the truth. Blinds us even to our Savior who, though innocent, we blamed for everything we were guilty of and made sure He paid for it. We deserved His punishment. He deserved our worship. Father, forgive us, we did not know what we were doing.

- Josh Hallahan, 2023



**“When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” (John 19:26, 27)**

As I sat and reflected on this passage, the themes of selflessness and provision came to my mind. I thought about people in my life who had exhibited these themes. I quickly thought about my father-in-law. He was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer in 2016 and died in 2020. But I can look back and see how even when he knew death could be around the corner at any time, he always had the future in mind for his loved ones. Within those last four years of his life, he made repairs and renovations to his house so that his wife

would have all she needed. So that his family could have a nice sanctuary to gather in as time went on. And so that his wife could welcome traveling ministers and missionaries as needed. He was also a pastor. And up until his literal last days, he would sit in miserable pain and exhaustion with his ministry team as they made plans for the future of their church. He looked out for others, even in the worst times of his suffering.

And just a few moments ago we heard Jesus doing this to the greatest degree. The man who was God-in-flesh chose to give himself up to agonizing suffering and death upon a cross. I think about the cruel irony of the King of Kings being given a cross as His throne and thorns as His crown. Yet as He was dying, he made this pronouncement as King. Looking at His mother and His beloved disciple, and declaring with authority, “Behold, your son!” and “Behold, your mother!” With this pronouncement, he ensured that His mother would be taken care of. Echoing the overarching biblical command to provide for and protect the widow. After all, we don’t know what happened to Joseph. But we see that Jesus trusted His beloved disciple as the best person to care for His mother.

I think about the pain Mary felt to see her son dying upon that cross. I think about the pain she felt as she walked away from the only man, at that time, who always had her best interest and care in mind.

And what if we imagine ourselves at the foot of the cross in that moment? With our Lord looking down upon us – those whom He loves. What is our need? What kingly pronouncement do we hear? What provision does He give to us as hangs upon the cross?

Cody Neal 2023



**“And Jesus said to him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’” (Luke 23:43)**

Our text is from Luke 23:43 (ESV): And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” With Jesus, they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with the transgressors.” (Is. 53:12 (ESV)) Mark 15:27-28 (ESV)

And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way (as the chief priests, with the scribes and elders) Matt 27:44 (ESV)

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” Luke 23:39 (ESV)

Then something marvelous happened. The other criminal observed something in that faithful one, in the cross beside him, Who, though his life was about to expire, though he had been the good shepherd even to the pouring out now of the last drop of his blood; though he had been called a sabbath-breaker, a drunkard, and a friend to publicans and sinners, yet portrayed to this lost sheep the hope of glory, which he saw, and seized.

He had seen – Jesus. He had seized – Jesus. Whereas he’d been blind, now he saw, and we think he knew where his saving shepherd had come from, and where he was going: that he knew the glory of the age to come; that to be away from the body was to be at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8); that in Jesus presence there is fullness of joy; that at his right hand are pleasures forevermore (Ps.16:11); that he would eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God (Rev 2:7); And if he didn’t know, he knew, even as he was about to die, that he had

just encountered someone who did know, someone whom he completely trusted.

And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” (Lk. 23:42) In response, he heard the very words of life: And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Lk. 23:43)

What a memorial to Divine mercy and grace.

May we, also, be about the building of such memorials, as people, everywhere, see Jesus, in us. Thanks be to God.

-Brian O’Leary 2023



**“Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani” which means  
“My God, my God,  
why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34)**

Jesus’ words from the cross - My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? - are the heart cry of our humanity. This is about more than forensic soteriology. This is man in pain at the sharp end of what it means to be God’s image-bearer in the world.

Jesus’ heart-rending cry is echoed in all our lives as we follow him to the cross, through the tomb and into this Easter life. Real pain isn’t a philosophical or theological construct. When you are in pain, it’s almost impossible to think about your life from a position outside it and consider your options critically. Real pain emotional, physical, spiritual, brings us to a clarity of existence and purpose. Somehow, like Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross, our pain means something in the salvation of the world. To follow Christ is to cry that cry in anger, frustration, fear, or despair.

There are two places in the Scripture that help us in those moments and help us when we cry

out with Jesus - My God, my God why have you abandoned me? Those two places are Psalm 22 and Romans 8.

It is our vocation to share with our brother Jesus to stand in the place of the world’s pain and pray. That idea comes from N.T. Wright in his writings about Easter and vocation. But I would take Tom’s idea one step further. It is our vocation to live at the place of the world’s pain and be God’s image-bearers so that God’s Kingdom will come on earth as it already is in heaven, even when it means crying out: My God, my God why have you abandoned me?

The Psalter flowed through Jesus’ veins like blood, so his quoting of Psalm 22 here makes sense. What makes this picture clearer is to hold Romans 8: 22-27 alongside. Paul writes about the groaning of all creation, including ourselves,

*groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope, we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we await for it with patience. Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 23b-27)*

That groaning even to the point of crying out is not just Jesus’ vocation but ours as well as we follow him. We are mere followers but the groaning, the suffering, the sense of confusion and loss feels the same to us when we are in the midst of it. Yet, we participate in that groaning and in that seeming abandonment as part of our vocation as God’s image bearers.

On this side of Easter we can hold on to the promise of Romans 8:28ff:

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

There is rich texture and depth in this passage that helps us in our crying out and in our groaning.

For years, I have understood that this moment in the crucifixion is where God turns his back on Jesus, literally abandons him who has become sin for our sake. I have had a hard time getting past the guilt that Jesus had to do this for my sin. What kind of all-loving God could demand that? As I have gotten older, lived longer in the Kingdom and gotten more 'life experience', I think I have been holding the image the wrong way around. What we need to know today as Easter people is that Jesus' suffering mattered to God and our suffering as we follow Christ matters to God and to the salvation of the world

- Kelli Sorg 2023



**“After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.”” (John 19:28)**

He was hanging on the tree, body gasping for breath. He had been there for hours by now, in the heat and the sun, but it was nearing the end. Jesus croaked out, “I thirst.”

There was another time Jesus expressed thirst. It was also in the middle of the day, hot and dry. He was sitting next to a well and had no way to draw water. He disregarded barriers and conventions and asked for a drink. The woman

responded with surprise and perhaps even discomfort. He responded, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” They went on to have a conversation in which she came to know her own thirst, her own brokenness, and began to recognize the quenching, the healing that comes from knowing and being known by the Messiah, the one who would set all things right.

That day, thirsty himself, he had offered the woman truly quenching water. Later, he had extended the offer to all the Jews. On the last day of one of the great feasts, the Feast of Tabernacles, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink!” He promised, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” The promise he extended to the woman at the well, he now extended to all the Jews, everyone who would listen and believe.

That time, like before, his declaration confused many people but also convinced many of his being the Messiah. Who could just promise living water -- in a way that was true? And this man could follow through.

And, yet, today, he's thirsty again. The one who promised, who offered the quenching water of eternal life is thirsty and dying on a cross. When was the last time he had a drink? Last night, around the table with his friends -- and his betrayers. He had shared the cup with them. And not just any cup -- the cup of the new covenant. “This is my blood,” he had said.

His blood was draining from his body. How the disciples must have remembered the previous evening so differently from this moment on. His blood was actually draining out of his body, making him desperately thirsty as he died. Those standing around, watching him die, heard his strained cry. Grabbing a reed and a sponge, they offered him sour wine. Scorn, dismissal -- these were how the thirst of our Lord was responded to. Perhaps the sour wine was intended to reduce the pain, but for whose

benefit? So the soldiers can go home more quickly?

In the face of his broken body, his helplessness, his thirst, he was offered scorn and dismissal. And yet, in this thirst, perhaps like that thirst by the well, he's offering others a cup. This cup he had offered to quench their thirst, our thirst, was pouring out and he felt thirsty.

-Emily Mahoney, 2023



**“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “it is finished.” And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:30)**

TETELESTAI from ‘telew’ may be the least understood word that Jesus ever spoke. Outside the mind of God, no one was privy to the depth of Jesus’ word. If Satan and his angelic rebels now exiled in the low heaven on earth had known what was happening, they never would have aided the religious and civic leaders to this measure of execution. Even the angels in the high heaven of God are described as watching intently to see the actions of God among humankind.

The Pharisees, though they had memorized the law and prophets, could not see those writings fulfilled in Jesus. They projected their thoughts onto the heavenly Father and imagined a different kind of Messiah.

The Twelve were almost certainly not present at the cross to hear this word in person... with the exception of the disciple “whom Jesus loved”. They had fled at the arrest. The disciples, other followers and family, with all Israel, had been trained how to think of Messiah by the Pharisees. The disciples, though, have been seeded with the truth about what was happening, but it would be weeks,

months, and years later that this planting would germinate.

Even to this day, with 20 centuries of insight and experience, “tetelestai” is yet unfolding. Translating this word to “finished” is very one-dimensional. To our ears it sounds like ‘done, over, final all stop.’ That is part of what is being communicated, but only a very minor part. Jesus’ life in the natural world though God Incarnate subject to the limits of time and space-- is ending. His earthly existence with teaching, healing, love-relationships, conflict, and physical realities is expiring. His days of trekking long miles, weary, overheated, underfed, coaching mere children into an army of sacrificial fighters are through. The 3.5 year boot camp (sandal camp) is graduating. His days of experiencing life outside the garden of Eden immersed in fallen humanity and the cursed world done. Done were the nights spent in prayer reaching, straining to hear the voice of his Father. For all eternity he had unbroken, intimate communication with his Father in the Spirit. Now the very thing that marked his existence had become a matter of work, discipleship, and dedication...his intimacy turned into longing.

While he is clearly voicing the reality that he is being extinguished at this time on the cross, he has made it plain he knows that what happens just beyond this dying is a glorious pouring out...and what is happening in the here and now of the cross is making it irreversible. I wonder what the powers of darkness heard when these words fell from Jesus’ lips with his last few breaths. If not at this moment, then certainly in the next few weeks, “tetelestai” would take on a new cosmic meaning. If the fallen angels had known what was coming, they would have put this day off as long as possible. But their raging contempt for YHWH could not be held back.

Jesus told his disciples in some detail that much was going to happen on the other side of this seeming end. He would “rise again”. In his



newly completed spirit-body, just a few days later he would begin exposing details of the emerging aeon released from the crushing finish accomplished on Good Friday.

What things are not finished with the word "tetelestai"?... Jesus diving to the depths of the prison of the unredeemed dead and bringing freedom; Jesus reviving in the tomb, then appearing, teaching, communing with his beloved ones, and then renewing his full oneness with the Father. But the thing that he was most fixated upon was leaving so that the Holy Spirit could be manifested incarnated in the earth...the gestation of the body of the risen Christ... the church. Now for over 2000 years. So as it turns out the great majority of things till now and into the unending future were not finished that day only begun.

"Tetelestai" its root "telew" is a much more complex expression...it has deeper layers of communication. It means 'to complete, to fulfill, to accomplish'. In the context we now understand, it might better be said "sealed or fixed or established".

Jesus' great mission was to redeem. In his singular self-sacrifice he completed the transaction that tore up and burned the mortgage on our lives. His pronouncement of "telew" over us is a statement of permanent favor, a confirmation of our eternal welcome, and a promise of his unwavering jealousy for us...it was the revelation of his core personhood...his undeterred force of being to seek the lost sheep, uncover the lost coin, and retrieve lost sons.

So "it is finished" is not acquiescing to the way these vicious injustices have been carried out; it is a purposeful submission to the greatest injustice as a means of creating a new Justice. "Telew" on the lips of the perishing Messiah is the trumpet blast heard across the universe a pronouncement of his stalwart fortitude and resolute determination that YHWH will be glorified and our rescue and inclusion are his

intent. "Tetelestai" affirms that the saving transaction has been completed.

But Jesus' work was not merely to incarnate as a human and break the power of law over us. He said, "I have come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it." Jesus became the Incarnation of the law the living word of God! In the Jewish synagogue it takes 3.5 years to read the law and prophets Torah and Haftorah. Jesus' ministry was 3.5 years. He not only followed the law, he materialized it in the physical world. He was to become the synapse, the circuitry for the spirit of God to flow in regenerative power through all systems he created.

Jesus' other mission was to deliver a perfect revelation of the Heavenly Father to the world. "If you have seen me you have seen the Father." I believe that this is what Jesus is most referring to when he says "tetelestai". He was saying that this horrible, tragic, vicious, public execution is the completed self-portrait of God's face. The depiction of love so holy, so fiery, so unquenchable, so sacrificial, so humble, cannot be conceived of by the created realm. This horrifying, tortured, collapsed corpse explains who God is.

The God of all might chooses weakness? The master of life embraces death? The giver of everything receives nothing. With "tetelestai" the last brush stroke is now applied. The artist's signature on this portrait is scripted with this word on Jesus' exhale as he releases his spirit to his Father's hands. He sinks into the dark abyss with no Father's voice as the army of angelic hosts are being restrained from ripping the world to pieces to rescue defenseless, perfect Jesus. At the same time the Father's hands are simultaneously tearing the temple dividing wall from top to bottom as a father beyond grief tearing his holy garment in agony. The great hymn line "did e'er such love and sorrow meet" identifies it. The heart of God the Son stopped beating. A soldier's sword spilled his blood on the earth with the fluid from his collapsing lungs which shortly



before had carried the breath of the holy spirit releasing the words of God. The disfigured, abused, body on a pole and crossbeam is the photograph of God himself.

When the desert Israelites were attacked by serpents, God told Moses to place a serpent on his stick and raise it in the air...when people saw it they would be healed. For them the offender became the redemption. If you can hear it, God the beloved has become the offender in order to be the redeemer.

The broken creation will be restored...it is destined;  
Our complete redemption has come...it is sealed;  
All things will lead to the Father's glory...it is established;  
He has shown us who he is...  
Tetelestai.

-Jeff James 2023



**“Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having this he breathed his last.” (Luke 23:46)**

*It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44-46)*

This isn't how it was supposed to end.

I close my eyes, take a deep breath, and look again, but his chest isn't moving. He put his spirit in your hands, Lord. I heard the words, but they can't mean the end. When David the king called the same words, asking for

deliverance, you delivered him. Wasn't this man more than David? Why couldn't your hands restore him? His hands restored sight and life and hearing. His hands broke a few loaves into a feast for thousands. His hands made demons flee. Are your hands any less?

A guard passes, ready to go home, and I flinch as he pierces this man, this man I love, this dead man, and blood and water flow. It's over, I see that, but this isn't how it was supposed to end.

He said God was his father; he, the beloved, obedient son. He was the servant, the shepherd, the one we waited for. That had to be true. All of creation knew it was true. The wind knew it was true, as did the waves. The bread knew it was true as it split over and over and fed a multitude. The fig tree knew it was true and withered under his gaze.

The demons knew it was true, shrieking in fear when he approached. The mothers knew it was true when they pushed past us and asked him to dandle their babies on his knee and speak blessings over their tiny lives.

Because it was true, this isn't how it was supposed to end. If he could turn over tables in the temple, his eyes dark with anger, and thwart haughty leaders at every turn, why couldn't he have stopped this? Who was this man to give his last breath to the God who was supposed to love him, the God he called Father?

The God who was supposed to save us through him.

He had barely started, but now it's over, and I don't know what to do.

Except... It isn't over. Signs everywhere say he was here, that what we knew was real. Behind me a man holds one sister in each arm and weeps. I saw that man take his first breath in

four days, and he breathes still, even if that breath hitches in sorrow at the sight before us.

To my right a man born blind is on his knees, weeping into his hands, having just seen the darkest day of his life. I wonder if he laments having vision, if this sight is more than his brand-new eyes can bear.

He showed us God, put the leaders in their place, explained the Law, washed our feet, slept in our boats, loved us to the end, left bits of himself and his love all over Judea, and now...

This isn't how it was supposed to end.

Years down the road, I, Jill, echo the same thoughts. When blood and water flow from my dreams, those words come first. I say them as I drop a rose on the grave of one gone too soon. I say them as a child I love turns from her family, her home, her faith, to pursue life on her own. I say them when the diagnosis is bad and the budget needs to stretch and the car turns over for the last time.

I say the words when being in your hands feels dangerous and lonely, when what I love, what I think I need takes its last breath and restoration isn't on the horizon.

This isn't how it's supposed to end.

My words echo back to the shadows, where the last breath was given, where he fell into the hands of the Father he loved. Those he called followed and watched and learned, walked miles and miles in circles, dreaming of the future, of victory and a new world and ancient promises come to pass. But now...

They grieved because they saw the dark and forgot about the dawn. They forgot the promise that until the end, every dark night is followed by the dawn. And after the end, there are no more dark nights and only the dawn. It all, in any direction, leads to the dawn.

Three days. Those who wept on the hill, who saw the final breath, who stumbled home numb and afraid, would wait three days in the dark. The lowest depths of sorrow were about to give way to the highest heights of joy. Truth would never be clearer. Patience would never know a greater reward. The hearts of men on the road were about to burn as the mystery of the ages was explained by a voice of compassion, a voice they knew, a voice they thought never to hear again.

They didn't know the plan, and their eyes were closed until the third day's dawn, when the light came over the horizon and the ancient shadows were banished in a glorious, eternal glow.

Whether they remembered or not, whether they believed or not, the rabbi was safe in his father's hands, waiting for the final act, waiting with clouds and angels until it truly begins.

Waiting for the dawn.

Here, now, I know the plan. I know the end. I know that dawn comes in days, that the old becomes the new.

And yet I echo the words of the lost. I admit I speak them more than I ought, the heartfelt cry that this isn't how it's supposed to end.

When those words escape my heart, Lord, remind me again, as you remind me every time, that dawn is only days away, that my soul is safe in your hands, that the plan is good.

Remind me that what the wind knew, and the bread knew, and the mothers knew, and the demons knew, and the disciples knew, takes wing with the morning.

And with that morning, with that dawn, all things are new.

Because this is, from the beginning of time to the end of the age, exactly how it had to end.

-Jill Penrod 2023