

## The Seven Last Words of Jesus

1. 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”**

Luke 23:33-34

*Forgiveness – not self pity, or a cry for help, or vengeance – but forgiveness was the focus of Jesus as he struggled with pain, exhaustion, despair. Out of the depth of his humanity came this claim upon his God, who he still called Father, to forgive those who were doing this to him. In his brokenness he had compassion for the behaviour of those who were also broken people. What tender mercy! And if forgiveness was his cry when he was in most desperate of places how can we imagine that he ever asks less for us from the Father? If he would desire forgiveness for us at the very moment, under the very weight of our worst, we can be assured that forgiveness is what he is always offering us.*

2. One of the criminals there threw insult 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.”**

Luke 23:39-43

*Love, mercy, eternity are not distant rewards for getting answers right! Love, mercy, eternity are the qualities of relationship with the divine beloved. And when we recognise the Beloved we are invited into the timeless embrace of God, and we are already in Paradise. It is but a thin veil, a breath, a focus of attention, that separates life and eternal life and the most seamless transition from life to eternal life is to be gazing into the face of Christ as talks us through the journey he knows for himself.*

3. 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. John 19:25-27

*Jesus the Christ, the eternal one, gives us to one another to love and care for. Knowing he would no longer be there to care for his mother and his disciples he gave them to each other. And so it is true for us, we are given to each other, for better or for worse, to love and care for. In the days ahead look into the face and life of those around you and here Christ say “Here is your brother, your lover, your friend, your neighbour.” What we do for one another we do for Christ.*

4. And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. “Elo-I, elo-I, lama sabach-thani?” which mean, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** Mark 15:33-34

*Jesus did not die heroically like a God merely in the form of a human. He died as a human being – excruciatingly present to the pain, despair and sense of abandonment that any one of us might experience. He entered fully into the experience of death and was not spared any of its detail. He was obedient, faithful, loving even to death. And although broken to the point of anguish he continued to cry out to the one he knew as Father, as God, as Source of all love and life. In quoting from psalm 22 he cried out his fear, his anguish and his trust, his hope – and they were not contradictions but deeply the same thing.*

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

*The one who had declared himself living water now thirsts as does any dying creature. Reduced now to the last creaturely instincts he is near to extinction, nearly finished with. There is no triumphal choral music, no watercolour wash of light, just a ruined man hanging from a cruel cross, hanging onto last bodily reactions. And even in this cruel wasteland of suffering, brokenness and abject failure the eternal power of love is stirring and for the witness the faintest hint of prophetic purpose is recognised.*

6. A bowl was there, full of cheap wine mixed with vinegar, so a sponge was soaked in it, put on a stalk of hysopp and lifted up to his lips. When Jesus had received the wine, he said: **“It is finished”** John 19:29-30

*It is finished. Suffering is finished with. Life is finished with - the work of living the life of creature is finished with. And the work of bearing witness to God's love is finished. He had done, been all that he was and been faithful. With relief it is finished. But what despair and sense of failure may his words also have carried? At the end just another creature so broken that he wants only ending and relief? A cry of defeat more than achievement for we know looking back that the real work of salvation was yet to come in the tomb and breaking forth from its confines. We must sit here at the foot of the cross and know that our Lord suffered the deepest cruelty of all for us – anguish and despair of soul.*

7. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, **“Father, into your hand I commit my spirit!”** And having said this he breathed his last. Luke 23:46

*And at the last he gives himself back to God – his source, his beginning, his home, his true heart's companion, his Father. Not in triumph or glory but with every broken instinct and desire he gives himself back to where he comes from. As we too will do. At the end we are all much the same, at the end we are all creatures making our way back to the creator. And the difference is only in if we know our creator intimately and trustingly and can with the personal name of God – Father – give ourselves over in the deepest instinct of trust and hope. The blessing and reward of a faithful life is that we might at the end leap or fall into the arms of God as a child leaps into a deep pool of water in which their adoring parent waits to catch them. Jesus last words were those of childlike faith. Broken and despised and having tasted of despair he now lets go of life knowing that his Father will catch him and all will be well, all manner of things will be well. At the end the son of God falls into the arms of his Father as gratefully as any of us might do. Truly this man was the Son of God.*