



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Good Friday Seven Words Service
Pastor Randy Ott

First Word

When the soldiers put Jesus on the cross, they offered him gall to drink. Gall was a narcotic. It makes sense. It would make the soldiers' job a lot easier. A drugged man is not going to be spitting out as much bitter venom and bile against those who are crucifying him and taunting him. But we know from Scripture that Jesus refused that drink. He took nothing to reduce the suffering he was enduring as the punishment for our sins. It's a blessing for us because it enabled him to speak the Seven Words from the cross that are recorded for us in Scripture that we focus upon today.

As we consider the First Word from the cross in Luke 23, I'd ask you to picture yourself in a courtroom. Or maybe first of all in the hallway outside the courtroom. The person who has accused you of a crime you had not committed, the person who has lied, the person who was manipulating things looks over at you with a knowing, mocking sneer on his face. You go inside the courtroom. The judge enters. Everyone stands. What silent prayer do you offer as everyone is standing? Is it "Father, forgive the person who was mocking me in the hallway"?

When you're so exhausted that you can't carry a piece of wood another step, they have to find someone else to carry it for you as you fall to the ground, what is going to come out of your mouth? Cries of anger or bitterness? A desperate whisper under your breath that this is all terribly unfair? Probably. But "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"? I don't think so. I don't think it would be anything that you and I would be saying at this point in time.

You and I are sinners. You and I love ourselves more than we love others. Here we see Jesus fulfilling the Father's will that you and I don't fulfill. He loves perfectly even to the end. He loves those even who are crucifying him. He loves those that he sees, the people from the mob that were manipulated into crying out "Crucify him" and "Give us Barabbas," even though they didn't know what they were saying. He loves them with this deep and abiding love so that in the midst of his pain and suffering, his heart goes out to them.

God does this for us because we don't love perfectly. So as we hear the First Word of Jesus, rejoice in the Word of Jesus that reminds you that your Savior always put you ahead of his own interests.

Luke 23:26-34

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large

number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’

Then

*“they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!”
and to the hills, “Cover us!””*

For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Second Word

If you remember from the Gospels one of the accusations that were often flung against Jesus as a condemnation of him and his character and his teaching ability was that “This man welcomes sinners.” It was an attempt to put down Jesus because right-thinking Jews and right-believing Jews didn’t associate with prostitutes, tax collectors, and other open and known sinners.

We hear that and we think that’s just awful that people would think that way. How often today don’t we look down our nose at those who aren’t like us, those who aren’t as well groomed as we are or who aren’t provided for as well as we are? We think we’re not that bad, but would we really welcome a terrorist, an abortion doctor, a serial killer and share with them the Gospel of Jesus Christ because we want them to be in heaven with us? Or would we inside of ourselves silently say “They’re getting what they deserve. They made their bed. They should lay in it. We shouldn’t have to have any pity or any love for people like that.” Or do we simply love ourselves more than we love them because we’re too afraid to put ourselves on the line and share Christ with them?

In those instances, we’re not a whole lot different than these pharisees who muttered “He welcomes sinners.” In the Second Word from the cross, that’s exactly what we see Jesus doing. We are so vividly confronted with what our sins deserve and we are so vividly confronted with our shortcomings as well. Here’s Jesus in anguish and in agony. He’s hung between two criminals. He’s enduring the agony that shouldn’t be his at all, not even for a day. It should be ours for all eternity. Yet we hear Jesus again with a love that puts others ahead of his own interests.

A criminal cries out to him, the one who earlier in the day had mocked him. He now cries out to him, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” As we hear Jesus answer him, we have to kind of thrill inwardly, don’t we? The love that Jesus has for this criminal is the love that he has for us, the love that doesn’t turn his back on us. In reality, the plea of this criminal on this day is our plea. He’s speaking it on our behalf

and in our place. "Please remember me in love and not in your justice, not in your holiness. Don't give me what my sins deserve. Remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus looks to us to assure us that when the day comes when he calls our soul out of this world, he will say the words of love, "Today you will be with me in paradise." We can only respond by saying "Thank you, Lord Jesus! I don't deserve it. I can lay no claim to it except that you have promised it to me."

Luke 23:38-43

There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Third Word

The Third Word of Jesus from the cross focuses our attention upon the love of a son. As a child, did you ever get disciplined by your parents? Did you get sent to your room or have to do something else? Maybe you found yourself in your room and you buried your head in your pillow and you screamed as loud as you could because you were so mad at your parents and you literally despised them in your heart because of how unfair they were or how unreasoning they were or whatever your immature mind had dreamed up at that time. Or maybe they told you to do something and God had said "Honor your father and mother," and you did it, but your heart inside of you was pretty far from honor at that point in time. You did it and you spit and sputtered and muttered and everything else under your breath or in your heart or maybe even in your words.

Those truths that we have done in some way, shape or form are sins that killed Jesus. They are the nails in his hands or the nails in his feet. They're our sins. That's why when we see Jesus in this Third Word from the cross, loving and caring for his mother even to the end, we see him obeying the Third Commandment absolutely and completely perfect in our place because we haven't done it. We need a Savior who is absolutely perfect in our place, and here we see Jesus doing that.

His perfection that is credited to us, that is given to us as a gift when the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts, is now what moves us to want to obey all of God's Laws. Not just the Fourth Commandment, but all of his Laws. Not just when people are looking, but in our thoughts and in our words and in our actions. Our God has given us what we need, and he's given us what we don't deserve.

John 19:25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Fourth Word

In the Fourth Word of Jesus from the cross, things are changing. Earlier he cried out "Father, forgiven them, for they know not what they are doing." No more "Father." Now he simply addresses him as "God," because the weight of our sins crushes Jesus. It crushes him to the point that he is separated from God.

Think about that...God is forsaken by God. The Father withdraws his presence from the Son. He is forsaken. He is alone. The only thing that's with him is the guilt of our sin and the punishment that our sin deserves. He has to drink that cup of God's wrath to the last drop, that cup of God's wrath that the night before even contemplating it made him weary until the point of death when he was praying in the Garden.

Now he's in the middle of it. He's not enduring hell on earth as so many people foolishly say, "I'm not worried about hell. I've been through hell on earth. I'm not worried." He's not going through hell on earth. He's going through hell. Hell is the withdrawal of any of God's blessings, and none of it is there for him now.

This truth, it baffles me. It numbs me. How God can forsake God? It numbs me the fact that it happened because I'm a sinner. The truth of what Jesus is doing for us is what enables us to face death. We face death knowing that you and I, we will never be forsaken by God. We know that he was forsaken, yet we are forgiven. This is not a fair exchange. That's why when we teach one another how to share the Law and the Gospel, we don't call it God's fair exchange. We call it God's Great Exchange because the punishment that we deserve was put on Jesus. Here he is enduring the depth of it. The forgiveness and the perfection that God demands of us has been given to us. That's what changes our lives, and that's what gives us the confidence to face eternity.

Matthew 27:45-49

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

Fifth Word

The Fifth Word of Jesus from the cross speaks of fulfillment of prophecy. "I thirst." It says he wants to fulfill Scriptures. It reminds us that Jesus is human like us. He was humiliated for us. He hurt like us. And healing for us is in his wounds as we read

earlier today. "I thirst." Why? Would a little wine vinegar now really make it that much more palpable to hang on the cross?

We are told it would fulfill Scripture. In Psalm 22, Jesus had said "my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth" through David. We hear the Messiah through David telling us what he would go through. It reminds us that Jesus as our Messiah fulfilled all the Scriptures. But he didn't just fulfill everything the Messiah would have to endure. He fulfilled the work of the Messiah, which is taking away the sins of the world.

Scripture must be fulfilled. Jesus must accomplish his task. And perhaps now that death was near, he has this drink, not only to fulfill Scripture, but so that soon he would be able to speak a victory cry before he returns to his Father.

John 19:28, 29

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

The Sixth Word

One word can make all the different. When I have a child read a passage in Confirmation Class, if they skip over the word "not" or they add the word "not," it's going to make a big difference in understanding the passage, right? One little word can make all the different.

One little word in your life can change your life completely, right? If you're waiting in the doctor's room and the doctor comes back, think of the difference the word "positive" or the word "negative" means as you hear those results from the doctor's test. One word can make all the difference in the world. You might think positive or negative after you've been tested for something by the doctor might be the biggest one-word change that turns your life completely around. I'm telling you today, it's not. The biggest one-word change that ever took place in your life, in my life, and the life of the world is this word of Jesus from the cross in John 19:30. In Greek, it's one word...tetelestai. The most important word you'll ever hear. It's the word a shopkeeper would write on a bill after the bill was paid in full. Scriptures that have been translated for us, the translators translated it as "It is finished."

Jesus isn't talking about his life. He's talking here about why he came to this world. His work as Messiah, his paying for the sins of the world, his being perfect in our place, his drinking of the cup of God's wrath in our place...the sins of the world are atoned for. His work is completed. So he cries out "It is finished!" Salvation won. Satan defeated. Salvation completed. It's all right there in that one word. The most important word you'll ever hear.

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Seventh Word

Jesus' last Word from the cross as we consider it today comes from Luke 23. Once again, we see that things are changing. Now it's "Father" again. It's no longer "God." It's "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. I've suffered hell. I faced all of Satan's temptations. I have endured it all. I commit, willingly now I die because my work is done. Now I'm coming home." A loud voice. A triumphant cry.

Mourn at what our sins did for Jesus on this day and every day that you contemplate your own sinfulness, but thrill at the knowledge that he willingly did it to bring us to be with him and the Father, both now and forever, so that we know that Christ's victory cry is our victory cry.

Luke 23:33-46

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The Death of Jesus

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.