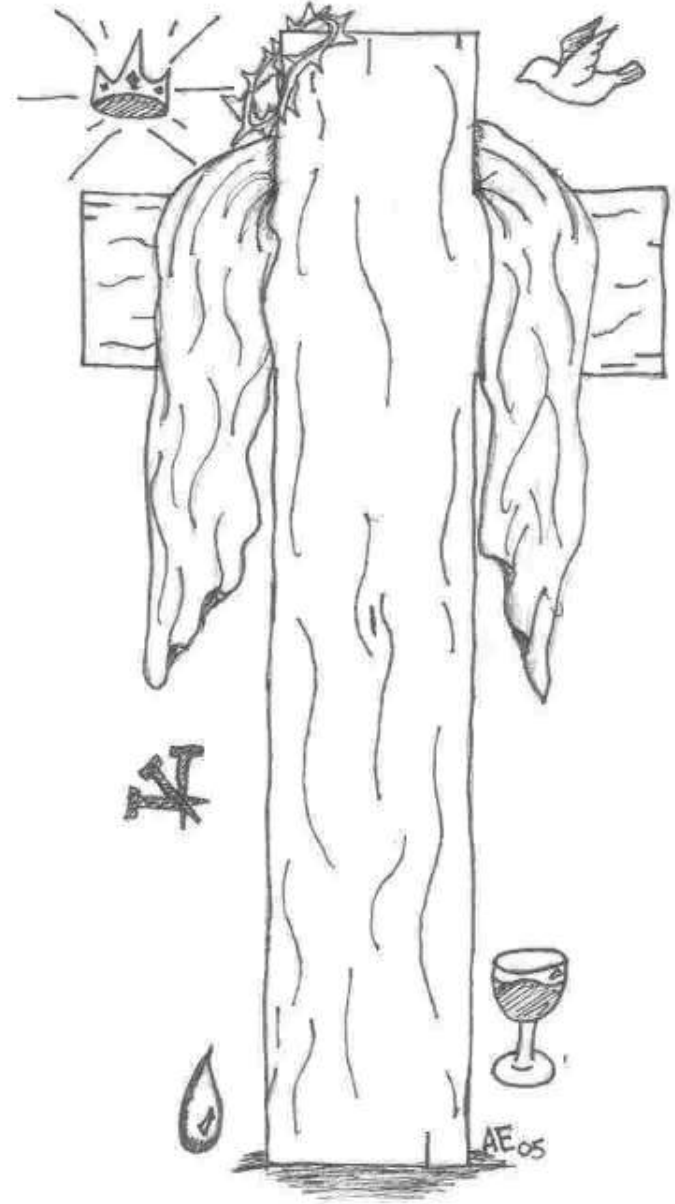


Holy Week 2005

The Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross



Cover illustration by Andrea East.

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A Word From Our Pastor

The devotionals for Holy Week 2005 focus on the last words of Christ from the cross. These words reveal the humanity of Christ (*I thirst*) and the depth of his relationship to God (*Father forgive them.*). These words also provide an opportunity for us to examine our humanity and our relationship to God as well.

As you move daily through Holy Week be honest with your emotions. They are part of the way God created us. We do become thirsty and tired; we feel angry, sad, and joyful. Jesus experienced those emotions as well. At the same time, use this week to deepen your relationship to God and discover in that relationship the fullness of life offered through Christ.

Thanks for taking the time to enrich your experience of Easter this year.

In Christ,

Tommy

Palm Sunday, March 20

Father Forgive Them

by Evelyn Crooke

Scripture Reading: Luke 23:32-38

Picture the scene on Golgotha that day. Placed on a cross between two thieves, Jesus hung there, his body broken and bleeding. Blood flowed from his head, his side, his hands, and his feet. Roman soldiers beat him and mocked him and in his thirst when he asked for a drink, they gave him sour vinegar and then cast lots for his clothing.

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

(Luke 23:34, NRSV)

Biblical scholars have long debated if those soldiers knew what they were doing. Did they realize that Jesus was the Son of God or did they consider him just another common criminal? Regardless of their thinking, in his brokenness Jesus asked his Father to forgive them.

Is it theologically correct to believe that you and I are included in that forgiveness? I think so! My sins and your sins were nailed to the cross on that dark day when Jesus was crucified. And because we have believed in him we are a forgiven and redeemed people!



Monday, March 21

You Will Be With Me in Paradise

by Keith Stillwell

Scripture Reading: Luke 23:32-43

I can hardly imagine a worse fate, than that of this thief on the cross. First of all, crucifixion was a terribly painful form of punishment designed to make the suffering last for days. I don't like pain. I faint at the sight of my own blood. I don't even like needles, so I can't fathom what it would be like to take a spike through my wrist. Secondly, crucifixion

*“Truly I tell you,
today you will be
with me in
Paradise.”*

(Luke 23:34, NRSV)

was a death sentence. To be crucified was to die a long slow death. I don't want to die. Not now. I am enjoying life—my family, my church, my work, my play. Thirdly, crucifixion was meant to make an example of its victims. The crucified were lifted up and laid bare for all to look on with condemnation. The thief on the cross was shamed by having his crimes

exposed. I am often reluctant to open up and allow others to see what I am really like inside, for fear they might not like what they see. If I am lifted up for all to see, I might be exposed as unworthy and inadequate and others might look on with disapproval.

Pain, exposure, death—this was all the thief on the cross thought he had to look forward to that day. He was in a seemingly hopeless situation. In his mind he deserved his punishment. He was, after all, a criminal hanging on a cross. On the other hand, when he looked over at Jesus, he saw innocence. He defended Jesus and asked, “Remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” Then, in this darkest hour, Jesus offered hope, “Today, you will be with me in Paradise.”

With these words, Jesus showed that God's approval is not about our worthiness. It's not about what we have done or failed to do. It's not about the approval of others. Paradise is about what Christ has done in his life, death, and resurrection. Paradise is about how much God loves us. If Jesus offer would Paradise and grace to this thief on a cross, he will offer the same to any of us.

Ask, “remember me,” and Jesus offers these words of grace to any of us who suffer, who fall short of God's will, who are ashamed, who face death: “You will be with me in Paradise.”



Tuesday, March 22

Here is Your Son

by Jill Robertson

Scripture Reading: John 19:25-27

“Here is your son!” Precious words spoken to me on a sunny summer afternoon in 1992 as a nurse placed John David in my arms for the first time. The beginning of the exciting journey of raising a son. Three years later I felt double blessed as I heard those words again and looked at Paul for the first time.

*“Woman, here is
your son.... Here is
your mother.”*

(John 19:26-27, NRSV)

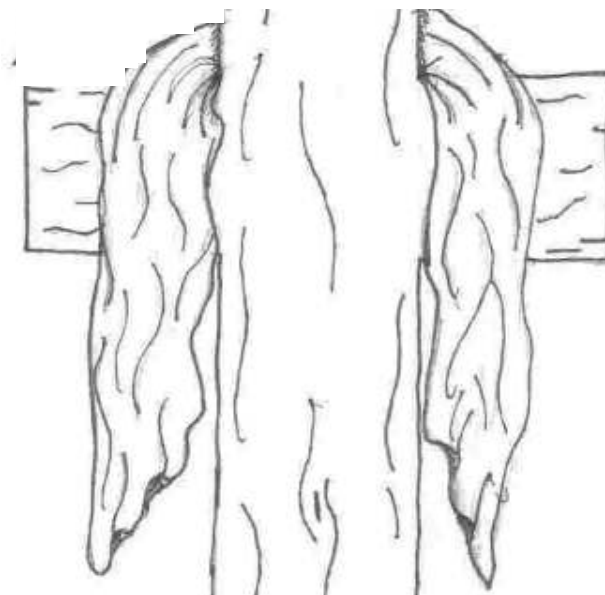
Being the mother of sons allows me the blessed opportunity to have something in common with Mary. Jesus was her son. He brought tremendous joy and challenges into her life. They shared a very special bond.

In the book of John, we see Mary at the cross. I cannot imagine her pain. I can imagine her memories as she looks upon her boy: Holding him as a newborn. Cheering as he takes his first steps. Kissing his knees when he tumbles down.

Cooking his favorite foods. Sitting up with him when he is sick. Laughing at his boyhood pranks. Reading him stories. Watching him grow say too quickly. Feeling pride in his accomplishments.

The sight of him on the cross must have been unbearable. Then he looks at her and speaks concerning John. “Here is you son,” utters Jesus. Jesus recognizes his mother’s need to be needed. He knows the void she will feel when his is gone. We see in these verses his love for his mother and his humanity as he cares for her in his last moments. Then he says, “Here is your mother,” to John. Jesus wants to be sure someone he trusts will look after her.

Leaving his mother and seeing her pain must have greatly increased his torture. Yet in his suffering he acknowledges her suffering. He saw her pain. He sees our pain. He saw her void. He sees our void. He knows our needs. He will meet our needs. Even in his darkest moment, he thought of his mother. He thought of me. He thought of you. He thought of our sons and daughters.



Wednesday, March 23

Why Have You Forsaken Me?

by Edward Clark

Scripture Reading: Matthew 27:45-49

One of the most misunderstood aspects of Christian faith is framed in the question of why Jesus came to earth. Many of us, if not most, grew up hearing Sunday school teachers and ministers support the notion that He came to die. A careful reading of scripture will reveal that He came to save, not die.

God obviously was aware that His attempts to reach people and have them worship Him and live with grace as their

*“My God, my God,
why hast thou
forsaken me?”*

(Matthew 27:46, KJV)

overcoats, had failed. Eden failed. The results of the flood failed. The kings, demanded by the people and never a part of His plan, failed. The Law failed and along with it, the sacrificial offerings by the priests. Nothing changed the hearts of mankind and God, evidently with great remorse, decided to send Jesus to become the absolute last Word that would be spoken. Those who had ears were to hear. Having heard, they were expected to live more nearly like Jesus and continue to grow in this new world of forgiveness and grace. He was a gift. There was nothing mankind could do to earn this eternal salvation from sin and the promised

eternity with the Father. Jesus represented the door through which those who desired to see the Father would pass. He came to save, not die.

The life of Jesus has been kept in quiet privacy and other than a few scattered anecdotal accounts of His early life, we only have the last approximately three (3) years of his earthly life from which to draw our conclusions. He began His work in the church and read from the Hebrew Scriptures, many of which revealed the struggle of the chosen people as they fell away from God time after time. His work included miracles, healing, teaching, and forgiveness of those who felt the need of it.

The work of Jesus, like the other attempts of God to reach His people also failed. He came to save, but the Jewish leaders, those who were included in the “chosen” race rejected Him as other prior generations rejected Jehovah.

The saving aspect of the work of Jesus, as it related to the original intent of God, was ended in the garden. He knew something was amiss and He knew the Godly plan was rejected, yet again, by those whom God had chosen to be His own. God explained the alternate plan and Jesus, obedient to the end, acquiesced. He prayed for a human deliverance, evidently knowing that His mission was changing from saving to dying. He had not come to die. Yielding to the will of the Father, He left that place and was, at the end, hung on a cross and became the sacrifice that would forever blot the sin of the people from the presence of God. His work was approved by the Father, but without the atoning work of the cross, it was all for naught. He had come to save, but now He would die.

The end of his human life contained the anguished plea of a child who had been abandoned by His parent. The pain, beyond human comprehension, forced from Him the plaintive cry, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” He had not come to die. He had not come to suffer.



Maundy Thursday, March 24

I Thirst

by Donna Pierce

Scripture Reading: John 19:28-29

Very recently I was checking my bag at the airport and, as I hoisted the heavy thing onto the scale, I was told it was over the limit. I could either pay a \$25 fee or transfer some of my “stuff” to my carry-on bag. Not a difficult decision! The “stuff” that was easiest to remove was a 12-pack of water I had packed in that bag along with a bottle in my purse and one or two more bottles in my carry-on. I was making sure my physical thirst would be satisfied.

“I Thirst.”

(John 19:28, KJV)

Although I shouldn't be, I am always amazed how the words and actions of Jesus so many years ago are just as relevant to our lives today. We can truly feel Him walking right beside us. How can we not know that He understands our pain, frustrations, physical and emotional needs when He experienced them all first-hand? When Jesus said, “I am thirsty,” he showed us His humanity and obvious suffering. How can we not love a God who takes our prayers and suffering on Himself? There is an unexplainable comfort knowing that He holds us so tightly in His arms because He UNDERSTANDS our painful experiences. He KNOWS.

There is also commentary that while Jesus was on the cross, He not only experienced physical thirst but also spiritual thirst...for us. He wants us to be saved, to know Him. Trying to recreate the scene of the Cross in our minds brings a picture of man AND God, completely human and completely divine at the same time. While it is more than my mind can comprehend, I **thank** God for His grace, His gift which helps us to understand in our hearts. I **thank** Him for His physical and spiritual thirst for us; for His sacrifice. I also **ask** God to help us quench His spiritual thirst by believing in Him and devoting our words and actions to Him.



Good Friday, March 25

It is Finished

by David Littlefield

Scripture Reading: John 19:30-42

The Finished Work of Christ

Recently I ran a race. A lot of hard work and preparation went into that race. There were many people in the race, and although everyone prepared, not everyone finished the race. While running, I too was concerned that I might not be able to finish.

One of the last words of Christ was “It is finished.” The work for which Jesus had come to earth was now completed. It is because of this work Jesus finished that our sins are forgiven, that we now have access to God the father, to heaven, to eternal life.

“It is finished.”

(John 19:30, NRSV)

Many people not familiar with Christianity will tell you that all the major world religions are fundamentally the same, that they all preach good works. Christianity is different at the core however, because it is not upon our works that we stand before our God in heaven; we stand upon the finished work of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Our works will not get us to heaven, not our prayers, tithes, our regular church attendance, not even our baptism. Only the finished work of Christ. His work is sufficient, it is

whole, and it is complete. The gospels illustrate this at the crucifixion. There were two thieves on the cross next to Jesus - one of the thieves was hurling insults at Christ but the other rebuked him and said “we’re receiving what we deserve... but this man has done nothing wrong.” and then turning to Jesus he said “remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus responded, “truly I say to you, this day you will with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:41-43). This thief had lived a life in rebellion against God, and now that he repented he no longer had the opportunity to do anything good. In fact if he now desired to do some good, he could not for his hands were nailed to the cross and shortly he would die. Yet solely based on the finished work of Jesus, the thief is now in heaven.

You see, the second we set foot in this race we know we will finish, and finish well... because Christ has already finished for us. We can now approach our God in confidence; we are adopted sons and daughters and can call Him “Abba, Father”, which is an endearing Aramaic term for father almost like “daddy” (Romans 8:15). No other religion can claim this confidence before God, and we know it is true because Jesus was raised from the dead, signifying God’s acceptance of His finished work.

What about our works then? Paul tells us we are to run the race in such a way that we might win (1 Corinthians 9:24). We *are* to live a life of good works, for in James we see that faith produces good works, and in fact faith without works is not faith at all (2:14-26). In this race we will stumble, and we will repent. We are to live a life of faith that glorifies God and shines before all people... as a witness to others and in thanks to God. But we should have joy in our struggles, because we know the outcome.. because the work is finished, and this is good news.



Saturday, March 26
Into Your Hands I Commend
My Spirit
by Tyler Wash

Scripture Reading: Luke 23:44-56

As Jesus took his dying breath up on the cross, he cried out to his father, “Into thy hands I commend my spirit.” This was his last public testimony on how to live a Christian life. He not only commended his spirit to God as he died, he also commended his life to the teaching of God’s word. We should not only commend our spirits to God as we die, we should also commend our lives to the God’s work.

*“Father, into
your hands I
commend my
spirit.”*

(Luke 23:46, NRSV)

Jesus was a perfect man and no matter how hard we as humans try, we cannot be perfect. However, we can strive to live our lives as the Bible instructs us. God did not leave us without guidelines to live a Christian life, as Mathew 22:36 says, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” We as Christians need

to make every effort to love our neighbors and to help whenever or wherever we are needed. In Mark 1:14 the Lord said, “Follow me.” God has a great plan for everyone’s life; he is calling us to be teachers, preachers, mothers, fathers, executives, writers, musicians, and many other occupations. We must accept God’s calling for our lives. We must follow him. The Lord says in Matthew 23:11, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.”

God has put a calling into our lives to be servants, to serve the poor and less fortunate, to be a friend to the friendless, to love the unloved, and to be a servant of God. If we follow the guidelines that God has given us, God will be pleased and will have a home prepared for us in heaven.

When our time on earth is up, when our journey is done, we then must commend our spirits to our heavenly Father. We must strive to live everyday as if it was our last, to show God our devotion every hour of every day in all of our actions. Jesus did this and God was pleased, we too must do this and in return, we will be given the gift of eternal life with our heavenly father.



Easter Sunday, March 27

Peace Be With You

by Alex & Tina Savelyev,
Hands of Hope, Kyrgyzstan

Scripture Reading: John 20:19-23

We all experience moments of crisis in our lives . . . that absence of balance and calm often accompanied by a very real fear. For most of us, the automatic response is to retreat, going to the safe haven that will bring us back to the point of peace.

Following the crucifixion of Christ, the disciples did just that. They holed up in a room with the door literally barred, fearful of what lay ahead. And then, much to their amazement,

*“Peace be with
you.”*

(John 20:19, NRSV)

Jesus stood before them. Perhaps sympathetic to their humanness, Jesus even provided proof, letting the disciples see and feel the wounds. The disciples believed . . . they were, at last, able to accept the blood offering of the Perfect Lamb.

Looking back even further, we recall the efforts Moses made to free the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. Exodus 12 describes the plan God gave to Moses to deliver to the Israelites . . . the Angel of Death would visit each home and kill the

firstborn. The Israelites were the chosen ones, yet only those who placed the blood of a perfect lamb on their doorposts would be passed over. Simply retreating until the crisis passed was not an option . . . the application of that particular blood was the only thing that could bring peace to that crisis situation.

So it was with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them. The disciples were *the* closest people to Jesus. They knew Him better than any others could have, yet that knowledge alone was not enough to keep them from retreating when crisis came. Peace came at the moment of realization that the blood of the Perfect Lamb was sufficient to meet any crisis. Upon receipt of the peace Jesus left with them, the disciples experienced an empowerment unlike any other they’d known before. Jesus sent them out and they became vessels through which God worked undisputed miracles.

May be it be so with us. Let us not merely retreat in a search for peace. Let us each accept anew the blood sacrifice of the Perfect Lamb and accept with it the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. May we be vessels through which undisputed miracles happen and others are drawn to The One True God because evidence of Him is clear in our lives. Let His peace be the power we employ as we navigate whatever lay ahead.

“Peace be with you.”