

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

Good Friday – 10th April 2020

LAST WORDS FROM THE CROSS – A MESSAGE OF LOVE

If you had the opportunity to chose your finals words in this life, I wonder what they would be? Have a think, what would you choose to say? Would they be parting words of love, or advice, or forgiveness? Would you take the opportunity to literally ‘have the last word’, having your final say when no one could argue back with you? Would they be words of anger or condemnation, leaving people in no doubt how you feel about them as you leave this world? And then think, what would these last words say about you, about your relationships, about what you consider to be important? What would they say about how you view the purpose of your life on this earth?

The well-known movie from the early 2000s, *Love Actually*, begins with a speech by actor Hugh Grant, playing the British Prime Minister. In this speech he says, among other things, that when people were flying to certain death in the planes involved in the September 2001 terrorist attacks, not one of the messages and calls sent out to family and friends were of hate, or advice, but they were all messages of love. When given the opportunity to send out final words, everyone chose to send out a message of love.

There are so many different ways we can look at the events of Good Friday; what happened here and what it means. The way I want to look at it today is to look at the last words of Jesus. Spread out across the Gospels there are seven sets of these; seven things Jesus said on the cross which say so much about who He is, His love for the Father, and about what Good Friday means for us. Let’s first of all look at each of the seven just briefly now, and then I invite you at home to have a more in-depth reflection on them.

The first words are the words of Forgiveness: “Father, forgive these people! They don’t know what they’re doing.” (*Luke 23:34 CEV*). Rather than cry out His innocence as might be expected, Jesus’ first words are to cry out forgiveness for those who are executing Him. We now look at them

as being not only words of forgiveness for those who nailed Him to the cross, but a cry forgiveness for us also. Words which sum up why Jesus had to die.

These are then followed by words of Promise: “I promise that today you will be with me in paradise.” (*Luke 23:43 CEV*). Jesus originally spoke these words of promise to one of the criminals who was dying with Him on the cross; the one who asked for forgiveness. As we hear them we can also hear Jesus speaking them to us; through His death we have the assurance of new life with Him forever.

Next are the words of Comfort: ‘²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and his favourite disciple with her, he said to his mother, “This man is now your son.” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “She is now your mother.” From then on, that disciple took her into his own home.’ (*John 19:26-27*). As He hung dying, Jesus still thought of His mother, giving His disciple John the role to now take care of her. Jesus cares. This word of comfort is there for us, including in the midst of what we are going through right now. Whenever we look to the cross in times of despair, loneliness, frustration, grief or hopelessness, we can see and hear the comfort God gives us through Jesus.

Fourth are the words of Desolation: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (*Matthew 27:46 CEV*) This is the most forlorn cry in all of human history. No other human being can ever claim to have been forsaken by God. As humans we regularly go away from God, but He never goes away from us. This is the price for our sin; being abandoned by God. It is a price Jesus paid so that we will never have to go through it ourselves.

The cry of Suffering: “I am thirsty!” (*John 19:28b*). This is both a cry of physical pain, reminding us that Jesus’ death involved real physical suffering, but also of spiritual suffering as a result of all He had been through. These words remind us that this is a real death, suffered for us.

Then we have the words which we don’t know if they were shouted out loudly, or quietly whispered or rasped, the words of Triumph: “It is finished.” (*John 19:30 NIV*) There is so much said in these three words. Rather than being words of defeat, they are words of victory. Jesus has completed all He has been sent to do, all that God can do to restore our relationship with Him.

And the final words Jesus spoke before He died, the words of Committal: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (*Luke 23:46 NIV*). Forgiveness has been earned, assurance and comfort have been given, desolation and suffering have been experienced, and triumph has been declared. Now, to make the sacrifice complete, Jesus hands all He has done over to God. These words are a cry of trust to God.

We will most likely not get to choose our last words from this life, but there is no doubt that Jesus’ final words were not said on the spur of the moment. Each one says so much. Together they tell of God’s love for us, of Jesus’ obedience to the Father, and of the new life and forgiveness which has now been won for us through the cross. Put together, they all give us a message of love; a love so great that God sent Jesus to die for us, so we can all be together with Him. This sums up not just this day, but our whole Christian faith. Look to the cross, hear the words which were spoken from there, know that in them we hear the strongest message of love we can ever hope to hear. Amen.

Prayer:

Lord God, on this day we remember all that was done for us in Jesus’ death on the cross for our sakes. Help us to remember this, to hold fast to your grace, and to show what this means to us by our thoughts, words and actions. Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

I now invite you, if you wish, to go through each of these sets of words from the cross, and to either reflect on alone or discuss with those with you what they mean for us.

1. The Words of Forgiveness

“Father, forgive these people! They don’t know what they’re doing.” (*Luke 23:34 CEV*).

- What does it mean for us that Jesus died to forgive all of our sins?
- Pray for His help to be more obedient in how we follow Him.

2. The Words of Promise

“I promise that today you will be with me in paradise.” (*Luke 23:43 CEV*)

- What are some of the promises of God which are especially meaningful to you?
- Why can we be sure that God will always fulfill His promises?

3. The Words of Comfort

‘²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and his favourite disciple with her, he said to his mother, “This man is now your son.” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “She is now your mother.” From then on, that disciple took her into his own home.’ (*John 19:26-27*).

- Think of the things which you may be especially worried or anxious about at the moment. How does knowing that God is with you in all of this help you to face and deal with these things?
- Bring anything which is causing you anxiety or stress to God in prayer at this time.

4. The Words of Desolation

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (*Matthew 27:46 CEV*)

- Have you ever felt abandoned by God? When this happens to us, though, who has really moved away, God or us?
- Thank Jesus that He went through the punishment for our sin, the worst thing that could ever happen to us, by being truly abandoned by God.

5. The Words of Suffering

“I am thirsty!” (*John 19:28b*).

- Although Jesus is God, He suffered for us in a very real way; physically, emotionally and spiritually. What does it mean for us that God loves us so much that He has gone through all of this for us?

6. The Words of Triumph

“It is finished.” (*John 19:30 NIV*)

- Not words of defeat, but words of victory, of accomplishment. What had Jesus had to do to be able to so confidently make this cry?
- It is finished, but just begun. With the finish of Jesus’ saving mission, what has now begun for us?

7. The Words of Committal

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (*Luke 23:46 NIV*)

- At the end, in ultimate trust Jesus gave Himself over to the Father. What is there in this Easter story to make us sure that we can trust in God no matter what happens, or what situation we are in?