

**Good Friday C'19**

**19 April 2019**

**Is.52-53; Ps. 22; Jn18:1-19: 42**

**St. Luke's Episcopal Church**

**North Little Rock, Arkansas**

**The Rev. Carey Stone**

**Savior of the world, by your Holy cross and precious blood you have redeemed us. Save us and help us, we humbly ask you. Amen.**

The traditional Good Friday service of the not too distant past would have lasted for three hours, from noon until 3 o'clock in the afternoon. One of the traditions of the service was to hear, meditate, or sing Jesus' "seven last words" that he uttered from the cross. I have chosen today to honor a much shorter version of this tradition by making them the focus of my homily.

It has been my experience, both as a professional counselor and a priest that the things people say on their deathbeds are highly significant. Sometimes they may give their blessing to their loved ones who are surrounding them. They may confess some regret from their past, or speak of the struggle that it is to die. At other times they may give important instructions about the disposal of their earthly possessions.

I have witnessed some who seek to unburden the consciences of loved ones by

speaking words of release from any debts, either emotional or financial. Rarely, if ever are trivial matters on their minds. This is all the more reason to give attention to Jesus' final confessions from the cross, his place of human suffering and death. Each of the seven last words will be spoken, followed by a few seconds of silence to let the word settle, and then a short meditation will be offered for each.

**I. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."**

~silence~

To forgive is at the core of our faith. Each of us come into the world in beauty but each with a tragic flaw – namely that we each seek our own will that is often opposed to God's will. We each are born into an earthly family of people who share this tragic flaw and who sometimes knowingly and unknowingly do us harm. This forms our backstory to all future stories and impairs our ability to live perfect lives. It is into this imperfect world our Savior came. Jesus sees all and knows all, including the tragic backstories of all those who took part in his torture and crucifixion. Because of his great vision, he was also of great compassion. In his words we find our own forgiveness and the grace to forgive those who do us harm

**II. "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."**

~silence~

Crucified between two thieves Christ gives us the image of the two selves we each have the power to be, one is our false self that cannot see Jesus, ourselves, or others the way God sees them. This is the self-that seeks to preserve our ego to the bitter end and ends up edging God out of our lives. The other self, represented by

the good thief whom Christian tradition has named "Dismas", reveals the non-egocentric/humble self that realizes the only hope of salvation and redemption for all of our mistakes finally lies with our Savior and what he accomplished on Good Friday. Let us say it from our hearts: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

**III. "Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother."**

~silence~

Jesus lived a life of utmost integrity and at his death he was most concerned about the well-being of those he was closest to and was about to leave. In his blessed mother Mary, and his closest friend John, the beloved disciple, we see that in the end it really is all about love. Only those whom we have loved and loved well will remain, and only how well we have loved will count.

**IV. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"**

~silence~

In Jesus' cry of dereliction, we hear all of the collective voices from all time who have ever felt God forsaken. He felt not only the individual guilt for sin like you and I sometimes feel, but the accumulated sin of all people for all time, and knows what the abominable absence of God feels like – the horror of being totally separated from God with no hope of restoration. On our worst day, we can take comfort that we trust a Savior who has been there in spades and has overcome it all.

**V. "I thirst."**

~silence~

It is hard for anyone to die and thirst follows most to their deathbeds, when they often ask for ice chips from the nurse's station. Jesus in almost total dehydration and in utter agony cries out for a drink, and all he was given was a

sponge placed on a pole and soaked with vinegar and a pain killing herb. This he ultimately refuses. He wants to drink his full cup of pain to the dregs without any sedation.

**VI. "It is finished."**

~silence~

Jesus was a man with a divine mission, a man born to die, that would be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He had been talking of this Day of days toward the end of his earthly ministry. It was for this he came - to totally decimate, and obliterate anything that could ever stand between us and the love of God. No demon, no sin, none of our bad thoughts or choices could now ever finally succeed at separating us from the love of God in Christ.

**VII. "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit."**

~silence~

Faithful to the last was our Savior. He had prayed, he had trusted, and he had acted, and now it was time to **Let Go**. He came, he saw, he understood, and ultimately did for us what no amount of money, or law keeping, church attendance, or sacrifices could ever purchase for us. Jesus did for us what we could not do ourselves. And now the only thing left is for him to reenter the hallowed halls of heaven rejoicing and embracing his Father, and the Holy Spirit and to dance!