

Week Seven: Seventh Word - Resurrection

"It is finished." (John 19:30)

Jesus has suffered extreme physical horrors, not to mention the unimaginable horror of bearing human sin. Now, on the verge of death, Jesus' suffering is finished. But there are other levels of meaning in the phrase "It is finished" besides the most obvious one. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus mentions his calling to finish or complete the works his Father has given him.

What are the works Jesus was sent to complete? As the Word of God Incarnate, he was the unique revealer, the one who perfectly revealed the glory of the Father. He taught the truth of God and, indeed, embodied that truth. He did works of power, signs that revealed his glory and led people to believe his teaching. He loved his followers and gave them the commandment to love each other. So when Jesus cried, "It is finished," he meant not only that his suffering was over, but that he had completed everything God had given him to do.

We must acknowledge the power of God in our lives and consider what are the things we need to do to complete our work. Where are you on your mission? Where is humanity as a whole?

Affirmation: God created me perfect and whole and His work is finished. God lift me up to finish my work in your name. I praise and give thanks as I behold His perfection in my mind, body and affairs.



Prepared by Jane A Harper: Lent 2011 & 2015

Note: In the 17th century, Jesuit missionaries in Peru developed a service of meditations for Good Friday based on the seven recorded utterances of Jesus from the Cross. The idea of the last seven words of Jesus was to instruct the native people and quickly spread. Not in any gospel are the two statements together, therefore it was a choice by someone to select the order. If you choose to research, you will find many different orders, most in the USA reverse the last two. I follow the order originally started in Peru.

Reflections for Lent

Through the last words of Jesus on the cross.



Week One: First Word - Forgiveness

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

Many English Bibles indicate that this statement does not appear in the oldest texts of the Gospel of Luke. Yet most scholars believe that these words are genuine words of Christ. Some have argued that early Christian copyists removed it, not wanting the perpetrators of Jesus' crucifixion to be forgiven.

This verse is the calling of Jesus to love others, even our enemies. It was his first word from the cross, the word of forgiveness and is our first step in this Lenten Journey. During the week reflect upon the forgiveness. Are there people in your life whom you need to forgive? Are you living with tense or broken relationships because of unforgiveness? Identify these people and situations, learn to step up to forgiveness. Be the first to make the move, do not wait on others.

Are you putting yourself down, thinking you are less than the perfection that God created? Acknowledge your mistakes, admit your imperfections, then forgive yourself.

Affirmation: Holy Spirit, help me to love others, to freely forgive and release all human hurts, even as I ask God to forgive my own trespasses.

Week Two: Second Word - Giving

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)

According to Luke, one of the criminals on the cross next to Jesus derided him. But the other saw Jesus with clear and compassionate eyes: "One of the criminals who hung there hurled insult at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us." But the other criminal rebuked him saying "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he turned to Jesus and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." To this man Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The word "paradise" derives originally from Persian where it meant "garden." Among Jews, it came to refer both to the garden of Eden, the place of divine perfection and to a region of heaven where the righteous experience blessing after death.

Jesus did not promise only that the crucified man would be in Paradise, but that he would be with him in Paradise. Jesus' promise to the criminal is troubling to those who want to limit God's grace in some way. His request that Jesus remember him wasn't so much a profession of faith as a cry of desperation. And Jesus gave freely the grace of God.

How can we limit God's grace? Christians who have been forgiven everything can be harsh and unforgiving with others. Moreover, we are often hardest on ourselves. The grace of God cannot be earned, it's greater than our limitations, it's greater than all our sin and given freely.

Affirmation: In faith I turn to Christ and enter into the realization that as I give, so shall I receive. I accept God's grace.

Week Three: Third Word - Service

"Dear woman, here is your son! And to the disciple, here is your mother." (John 19:26-27)

John alone specifies that Mary the mother of Jesus was among the women who remained near him until the end. In the Gospel of John, Mary was standing next to "the disciple whom Jesus loved," believed traditionally to be John, one of Jesus' closest disciples and the source of the gospel that bears his name. Observing these two, Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son," and to the beloved disciple, "Here is your mother". The basic meaning of Jesus' statement is clear. He was entrusting care of his mother to one of his most intimate friends and followers.

Jesus did not know the criminal to which he gave, but this request for service was a very personal request, for his mother to be watched after by his disciple John.

Commentators throughout the ages have rightly noticed Jesus' attention to the needs of others, in this case his mother, even in his final hour of excruciating suffering. This is a great example and surely fits with everything else we know about Jesus and an example of what each of us can achieve. Would you say "Yes" to a request such as Jesus made? Learn to accept these assignments and do not fear commitment, the rewards are greater than you can imagine.

Affirmation: Father, help me to fulfill every righteous obligation wisely and lovingly. I willingly listen to the needs of others.

Week Four: Fourth Word - Overcoming Temptation

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34)

The question of the fourth word from the cross is a direct quotation from Psalm 22:1. Jesus, in his moment of greatest anguish, prayed in words that had been etched upon his soul through years of synagogue worship and personal reflection. In this plea of desperation, is Jesus speaking to the earth illusion that what we want is not always within the Divine Plan, that it is God's will, not our will that must be done? And finally as Jesus would have known, we must turn to the power of God as later in the same Psalm at verse 19 "But you, O Lord, be not far off; O my strength, come quickly to help me." Indicating the overcoming of the temptation of this earthy life.

When we are at our deepest despair God hears our plea. The song "Lean On Me" by Gary Mathena states it like this: "Lean on me when you have no strength to stand, when you feel you're going under, hold tighter to my hand. Lean on me when your heart begins to bleed, when you come to the place that I'm all you have, then you'll find I'm all you need." This perhaps is the most difficult step, to fully trust and rely on our faith in God, even in the midst of our suffering.

Affirmation: In my desperation I confess my unbroken faith. Father, your love comforts me and your power strengthens me to overcome.

Week Five: Fifth Word - Humility

"I am thirsty." (John 19:28)

The thirst of Jesus reminds us that he was really experiencing the horrors of the cross, including extreme thirst. Moreover, it reminds us that Jesus was fully human, the sort of being who could be thirsty. Jesus was the Word of God made flesh. His incarnation not only allows him to reveal God to us, but it enables him to understand what it's like to be human. This is an encouraging insight. Because Jesus was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Thus he can sympathize with our weaknesses. When we are weak, when we struggle, when we feel pain, we cry out to Jesus who knows what it's like to be human. Because of Jesus, we come before God in humility, freely, boldly, crying out, "I am needy. I am afraid. I need forgiveness. I need your help. I am thirsty - in body and soul."

Affirmation: I am needy, I am afraid, I need forgiveness, I need your help, I am thirsty in body and soul. I drink of the living water of Spirit and every need of my body is fulfilled.

Week Six: Sixth Word - Triumph

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

This time Jesus prays the words of Psalm 31. In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me, take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

By quoting from Psalm 31, Jesus is not only entrusting his spirit to God, but also affirming his ultimate trust in God. Throughout our lives we rely on all sorts of things. We begin life fully dependent on our parents. Along the way we trust teachers, doctors, lawyers, pilots, engineers, spouses, presidents, police officers, friends, pastors and of course ourselves. But, in the end, we put our ultimate trust in God, and in God alone. We realize we can't save ourselves. We can't make eternal life happen. We can't defeat death. We can't earn our redemption. So, like David in Psalm 31, and like Jesus in Luke 23, we put our lives into the hands of God.

When we can truly put ourselves into God's hands, we experience triumph, the triumph resulting from all our spiritual work and feel the unlimited strength and courage that God gives us so freely.

Affirmation: Into the care and keeping of God I give myself and all that concerns me. I rely only on God. I rest from my labors and let His will be done.

