

Trinitarian Congregational Church
RSD
Good Friday
April 2, 2021

Prelude: “Jesus, Thou My Dearest Life”
J.S. Bach
https://youtu.be/3sKOss_n0Rk

Call to worship

Pat Shearer
Rosemary Dawson

One: The day of suffering and death has come.
Stand with the One who was despised and rejected.

All: **We come to remember Christ’s last moments.**
May the light of the cross guide our steps.

Special Music: “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded”
Hans Leo Hassler. Arr. Phillip Keveren
<https://youtu.be/yAi3Pu6-WdM>

Opening Prayer

Pat Shearer

Most remarkable God, your love is astounding! As we gather at the foot of the Cross today, give us renewed trust and love. Teach us that the darkest human hour is the brightest Divine moment, that where human disgrace sinks to its nadir, divine glory reaches its zenith. Teach us again that there is no limit to your love, and no exclusion zone to your salvation. Through Christ Jesus your holy Son. Amen.

The Seven Last Words

The First Word:

Suzan Smith

Tolling of Bell

“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.” (Luke 23:34)

Reflection

It makes sense that the first word of Jesus from the cross is a word of forgiveness. That’s the point of the cross, after all. Jesus is dying so that we might be forgiven for our sins, so that we might be reconciled to God for eternity.

Is it only those who are unaware of their sin, that God shows unmerited mercy? No, in the mercy of God we receive his forgiveness even when we do ‘what we know to be wrong’. God chooses to wipe away our sins, not because we have some convenient excuse, and not because we have tried hard to make up for them, but because he is a God of amazing grace, of unlimited mercy. As we read the words, “Father, forgive them,” may we understand that we too are forgiven through Christ, freely and fully.

Silence

The Second Word:

Martha Morse

Tolling of the Bell

“I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

Reflection

Here we have encountered one of the most astounding and encouraging verses in all of Scripture. Jesus promised that the criminal would be with him in paradise. Yet we have no reason to believe this man had been a follower of Jesus, or even a believer of him in any particular sense. He might have felt sorry for his sins, but he did not obviously repent. Rather, the criminal’s cry to be remembered seems more like a desperate, last-gasp effort.

Though we should make every effort to know and believe God’s truth, and though we should live our lives each day as disciples of Jesus, in the end, our relationship with him comes down to simple trust. “Jesus, remember me,” we cry. And Jesus, embodying the mercy of God, says to us, “You will be with me in paradise.” Even today, we are being welcomed into the very presence of God.

Silence

The Third Word:

Heather Tower

Tolling of the Bell

“Dear woman, here is your son.” (John 19:26)

Reflection

In our imagination we see Jesus alone on the cross. Yet here is Mary, his beloved mother, and John, his most cherished friend. To see him suffer through the horrors of crucifixion would have been unimaginably terrible. We’re reminded of the prophecy of Simeon shortly after Jesus’ birth, when he said to Mary: “and a sword will pierce your very soul” (Luke 2:35) When we are

in such agony all we can do is lean on others, on family. Jesus was Mary's family, the one most responsible for her well-being as the eldest son. But here is her son – on a cross. And so, he creates a new family even in the midst of dying. His words both reveal his love and direct her to another – to John. He asks the two of them to take care of each other. He sought a way to ease their suffering, to form a community of compassion and care.

That community lives on today, in the church and among God's people. We are called to look deeply to the one whose love cost so dearly, and then take up his word 'love one another as I have loved you.'

Silence

The Fourth Word:

Michele Lawler

Tolling of the Bell

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Mark 15:34)

Reflection

As Jesus was dying on the cross, he echoed these words from Psalm 22:

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?
Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.
Every night you hear my voice, but I find no relief. (vv. 1-2)

Like the psalmist, on the cross Jesus found a way to express the cry of his heart: Why had God abandoned him? Why did his Father turn his back on Jesus in his moment of greatest need? It is a very human cry, Why? Where is God now, when I hurt so much?" It is the cry of all who are overcome and lost in suffering.

It is here at the cross where we both acknowledge our own emptiness and find God's waiting grace. It is here we confront the truth that "at one time we were all alienated from God But now, by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually *dying* for us, Christ brought us over to God's side, making us friends with God. (Col 1:1,2)
It is a profound mystery that God the Father abandoned the Son for our sake, for the salvation and healing of the world. As Martin Luther once said, "God forsaking God. Who can understand it?" Yet even a miniscule grasp of this reality calls us to humility and confession, to worship and adore.

Silence

The Fifth Word:

Gwen Trulle

Tolling of the Bell

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

Reflection

Jesus experienced such suffering in the cross. Scourging, spikes, thorns, and hours of his life slowing ebbing away. Is it any surprise he would experience extreme thirst? On the most obvious level it could be read as a request for something to drink. Yet there is so much more. Perhaps Jesus was again looking back to the Psalms to express a truer need.

"O God, you my God, earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you,
my flesh faints for you as in a dry and weary land where no water is."

Who can tell if these words from Psalm 63 went through Jesus' mind? But a thirst for water is a thirst for life and a thirst for life is a thirst for God who promises streams in the desert, mighty rivers in the dry land, and living water to wash away every tear.

Here, at the end of it all, those promises seem far away - distant. And yet Jesus, forsaken by God, still clings to the memory and the hope of life. "I thirst."

As we reflect on Jesus' word, "I am thirsty," ask yourself 'what do I thirst for'. The world would offer us cheap wine to assuage our need, a poor substitute for the real thirst of the soul. Is our thirst reflected in Jesus, are we thirsty for him? As our souls yearn for the living water that Jesus supplies (John 4:10; 7:38-39) rejoice in the fact that he suffered physical thirst on the cross – and so much more – so that our thirst for the water of life might be quenched.

Silence

The Sixth Word:

Patter Field

Tolling of the Bell

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

Reflection

If you have ever known physical pain and suffering you know the relief that comes when it is over. When Jesus said "It is finished," surely he was expressing this sense of relief. "It is finished" meant, in part, "This is finally done!" But like so many of Jesus' words "It is finished" means more than just this. Eugene Peterson captures this double meaning in *The Message*: "It's done . . . complete." Jesus had accomplished his mission. He had announced and inaugurated the kingdom of God. He had revealed the love and grace of God. And he had embodied that love and grace by dying for the sin of the world, thus opening up the way for all to live as one with God.

Because Jesus finished his work of salvation, you and I don't need to add to it. In fact, we can't. He accomplished what we never could, taking our sin upon himself and giving us his life in return. Jesus finished that for which he had been sent, and we are the beneficiaries of his unique effort. Because of what he finished, you and I are never "finished", never stuck. We have hope for this life and for the next. We know that nothing can separate us from God's love. The new life we have in Christ will continue to grow and blossom. And one day what God has begun in us will also be finished, by his grace. Until that day, we live in the confidence of Jesus' cry of victory: "It is finished!"

Silence

The Seventh Word:

Linda Hescock

Tolling of the Bell

"Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" (Luke 23:46)

Reflection

Three of the last seven "words" of Jesus were quotations from the Psalms. Earlier Jesus had Psalm 22 in mind when he said, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" to express his anguish. Later he gave voice to Psalm 63 "I thirst", speaking of his unquenchable desire for God's presence. Now he borrows from Psalm 31, "into your hand I commend my spirit."

On an obvious level, Jesus was putting his post mortem future in the hands of his Heavenly Father. It was as if he was saying, "Whatever happens to me after I die is your responsibility, Father."

And yet the Psalm, and Jesus, are saying so much more.

Psalm 31 begins with a cry for divine help:

O LORD, I have come to you for protection; don't let me be disgraced.
You always do what is right, so save me.

It is not an empty plea, rather it rests in the knowledge of God's strength and faithfulness:

I entrust my spirit into your hand.
Rescue me, LORD, for you are a faithful God. (v. 5)

And by the end, the psalmist lifts up his voice in praise:

Bless the LORD,
for he has shown me the wonders of his unfailing love.
He kept me safe when I was like a city under siege. (v. 21)

By quoting from Psalm 31, Jesus was not only entrusting his future to his Father, he also was implying that he would be delivered and exonerated. No, God would not deliver him from death by crucifixion. But beyond this horrific death lay something marvelous. "I entrust my spirit into your hands" acknowledges the cost of suffering and looks ahead to the promise of the resurrection.

As we stand at the cross, we know the promise has been fulfilled, that Christ will rise from the dead. Yet here in this moment it is, for Jesus, the profound moment of trust and hope. For us, still today, death has a finality to it, and it is only in our trust and hope of the faithfulness and power of God that we too are assured of a glorious resurrection. May we have the courage to say "Father, into your hands..."

Silence

Closing Words

Go now,
Looking to Jesus

Postlude:

"Were You There?"
<https://youtu.be/LRaFdfkOVyY>

Heather Tower

Depart in Silence

music provided by Chris Harris and Lynne Walker
and special thanks to Heather Tower for her beautiful solo