

Seven Last Words

A Meditation for Good Friday

St Bartholomew's Dinard

3rd April, 2015

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|---|---|-----------------------|
| 4 | Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani ?
My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me ?
Passer-by | Mark 15 v34
Helen |
| 5 | I thirst.
Mary Magdalene | John 19 v28
Elaine |
| 6 | It is finished.
Centurion | John 19 v30
David |
| 7 | Father into thy hands I commit my spirit
Joseph of Arimathea | Luke 23 v46
Ian |

Closing prayer

Most merciful God
 who by the death and resurrection of your son Jesus Christ
 delivered and saved mankind:
 grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
 we may triumph in the power of his victory
 through Jesus Christ our Lord
 Amen

Hymn 499 There is a green hill far away

Blessing

Most merciful God
 who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
 delivered and saved mankind:
 grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
 we may triumph in the power of his victory
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Amen



1 'Father, forgive them – They know not what they do'.

A Legionnaire

I must be getting old.
If anyone had said
a crucifixion could upset me,
I'd have laughed in his face.
I'm too old to shed tears.
I've been a soldier far too long,
fought too many battles – and lived –
to be moved by an execution.
It all begins in the usual way.
We take him down to the barracks
where we have some fun with him.
We're doing him a favour, really:
the more we beat him up,
the quicker he'll die.
I hate Jews.
You can't serve In this God-forsaken land,
trying to civilise this 'stiff-necked' people
without loathing them.
They're so . . . so self-righteous:
they're right and we're wrong.
God's Chosen people ?
God help us !

For the life of me, I can't see
what they have to boast about.

I don't trust them.

They smile like the Sanhedrin,
waiting to stab us in the back,
or like Zealots, hidden in a crowd,
given a chance, they'd cut our throats.

So when we do this one over,
we don't pull our punches;
in fact, we like it – love it !

King of the Jews ?

Poor king !

We humiliate him.

Strip him naked.

Tie him to a pillar.

Whip him till the blood flows.

Put a purple cloak round him
and a crown of thorns on his head.

Bow down before him.

Spit at him.

Pull his beard.

Then it's time to go
so we take off the cloak,
give him back his clothes,
lead him up into the sun.

It's a mile to the execution.
He has his cross to carry
but stumbles under the weight.
At this rate, it'll take all day
so we grab a passer-by
to carry it for him.
When we reach the hillside,
we strip him again.
Nailing him to a cross,
I can see his eyes.
Pain and tears you'd expect
but there's something else.
Was it a trick of the light
or were his eyes alight ?
Not burning with hatred
but full of pity
as if he's sorry for me.
As we hoist him up,
something odd happens.
He's been unusually quiet.
I'm sure he's in pain
but he seems to take it.
Then he says something odd.
'Father, forgive them –
they know not what they do'.

He should be screaming,
cursing us in pain,
but he forgives us.

My world turns upside down.

We settle down to watch him die.

We play dice for his clothes
but I've lost it.

The man I kill forgives me.

What on earth can it mean ?

30 8 95 revised 28 3 07 & 29 4 14



2 Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

Demas

This is it then –
nailed to a cross,
left to die at Passover !
Tonight, the Angel of Death
won't pass me by !
What hope fighting
if our enemy is Rome ?
Romans aren't human:
too disciplined !
too organised !
They rule us
and the world
with a rod of iron !
But why should we,
Children of God,
be ruled by the uncircumcised ?
These foreigners, unclean,
know nothing of the Law
or of the One
who gave it to us !
I hate them
and the fact
I would have starved to death

once my land was seized.
When our crop failed,
I couldn't repay the loan.
The money-lender was a Jew;
tax Collectors are Jews;
all the Priests are Jews;
but they work with the Romans
while poor Jews pay the price.
Jesus of Nazareth,
him I feel sorry for.
What harm has he done
to die like us ?
Zealots like us kill
but he's different.
What he did was heal
and teach our people.
But Priests don't like anyone
questioning their authority.
He had authority
but not anymore,
hanging here
naked in the sun.
When my pal taunts him,
telling him to save himself
and us,

I tell him to shut up –
it's not right to mock him.
And then,
I don' know what made me
say to him, 'Jesus, remember me
when you come into your kingdom.'
Clutching at straws ?
My last straw but I meant it !
And he knew I meant it.
He promises me tonight
I'll be with him in paradise –
a garden, full of shade,
with running water,
fig trees, olive trees, vines,
a place of peace and plenty !
And I believe him –
honest I do .

29 8 95 revised 28 3 07 & 29 4 14



3a **Woman, behold your son . . .**

Mary

My son, my son,
my Jesus, my son.
How can I stand here,
helpless, watching you
slowly die ?
When Gabriel first came,
I'd no idea
where it would lead.
How could I ?
I was a girl,
quick to say,
'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.'
My womb was quickened,
I know not how.
I knew no man,
not even Joseph,
my husband-to-be.
'Highly favoured',
Elizabeth called me –
highly favoured
by strange visitors:
shepherds, stinking of sheep,
knelt at your make-shift crib;

wise men, perfumed, generous
gave gold, frankincense, myrrh.
In the Temple, Simeon prophesied
that you would be a light to men
but a sword would pierce my soul.
Today, standing here,
looking up at you,
that prophecy comes true.
When you were young,
there was so much
to treasure in my heart.
You were so special,
always so different.
In the Temple, just twelve,
about your Father's business !
In Cana, at the wedding,
changing water into wine !
In Nazareth, in our synagogue,
when they wanted to kill you.
And now, today, they do !
I hope they're satisfied –
even as I must be –
for even in death
you care for me,
entrust me to John's care,

to someone you love.

I've carried you in my womb.

I've carried you in my arms.

I've carried you in my heart.

And when they take you down,

I will cradle you again –

for one last time.

My son, my son,

my Jesus, my son.

31 8 95 revised 28 9 07 & 29 4 14



3b Behold your mother.

John

Helpless, I stand,
looking up at you,
fighting for each breath,
sweating out the little
that's left of your life.
Is this it then ?
So why are we here ?
You, because you're you
and have a job to do.
Me . . . because I love you.
After three years together,
I can't go off and hide,
leave you to die alone.
In Gethsemane, last night,
while you were praying,
I was well out of it.
Tired, I fell asleep.
No matter how I tried,
I couldn't stay awake.
Twice, you woke us,
then Judas came,
betrayed you with a kiss.
Soldiers seized you

and I ran away – afraid,
afraid to be arrested,
afraid to die.

And now I watch you die,
not caring if they seize me.

So where are the others ?

Only women for company.

Is death their business ?

They bring us into the world
then prepare us for the grave.

Why is your mother silent ?

How can she bear to see you,
her flesh in agony ?

Entrusting Mary to me
to treat as my mother,
you make us of one blood,
brothers-in-death.

If only I could reach out
to touch you one last time,
relieve your pain,
relieve your thirst,
as you have mine.

Why won't you save yourself ?

August 1995 revised 3 12 13 & 29 4 14



4 Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani ?
My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me ?

A Passer-by

I don't know.

I don't understand.

One moment we're shouting,

'Hosanna to the Son of David !'

The next we shout, 'Crucify him !'

How can things change

in less than a week ?

We had such hopes –

Jesus of Nazareth,

our Messiah,

come to kick the Romans out.

He'd a reputation:

he'd caused a stir,

he upset people,

important people,

people with influence.

But we were excited

when he rode into Jerusalem.

We'd heard so much about him:

how he'd fed our people;

how he'd healed people –

lepers, the demon-possessed;

how he'd taught in a way
we could understand.
We went wild
when he entered Jerusalem.
Our king had come.
But not like a king really,
not like Herod or Pilate.
more like one of us,
dressed like one of us.
But the enthusiasm
as he rode past !
Then things went quiet
till the next thing I hear,
he's been arrested
and he's up before Pilate,
charged with treason.
We crowd into the courtyard.
Pilate appears on the balcony,
Jesus under guard.
He offers to free him
or to free Barabbas.
Now Barabbas is a local lad
so it's a tough choice.
So while I'm still thinking,
someone shouts Barabbas

so we all join in.

'And Jesus ?' Pilate asks.

'What shall I do with him ?'

And the same voice shouts,

'Crucify him !'

so we all shout the same.

What on earth came over me ?

I've got nothing against Jesus

except Barabbas is a local boy,

a bit wild but a good lad.

I follow the crowd to see the end.

Jesus is on the cross, dying,

and some make fun of him.

'If he saved others

why doesn't he save himself ?'

'If you are the King of the Jews,

come down from the cross.'

'You said you'd destroy the Temple

and build it again in three days;

well let's see you save yourself now !'

Then I start to feel guilty.

He looks so desolate,

hanging there,

bloody and bruised,

abandoned, unloved.

And I feel sorry for him
and ashamed.

What have we done ?

1 9 95 revised 31 3 07 & 30 4 14



5 I thirst.

Mary Magdalene

In this heat,
his mouth must be dry;
his legs weak,
from taking his weight
off his shoulders;
his wounded body,
in pain, naked
for all to see.
Once I loved him,
and still I do.
I want to lift him down,
tend his wounds,
comfort him,
this man I never knew.
I've looked for love,
wondering who
would meet my need,
bring me the peace
I sought. None did
but he was different.
When first I heard,
I knew: I felt uneasy.

This wandering Rabbi,
who upset the Authorities,
upset me – upset me !
I wanted to hide
but let him find me.
Then I heard he was to eat
at the house of Simon the Leper.
I knew Simon well and his house
but with guests present,
I wasn't welcome.
It was easy to slip inside
to where he sat at table.
I'd brought a jar of perfume,
spikenard, to anoint his head.
Without moving, he sat there
as gently I rubbed it in.
I felt empowered.
I know what it is to be unclean,
the delight of the hot baths,
the luxury of cleansing oils,
but then, at his side,
I felt truly clean.
It was as if
he'd washed me,
removed the dirt,

the smear of guilt,
the grime of shame.
I wept.
And with my tears,
I washed his feet;
and with my hair,
I dried them again.
His smile pierced me;
I'd met the man to love.
The house was in uproar
and I was shown the door,
too overcome to protest.
Later, he sent for me
and I became a follower,
doing the jobs a woman does.
I didn't mind: I was with him.
I could've been more to him
If he'd wanted – he didn't.
it wasn't important any more.
It was enough to be with him.
So much to learn,
so much to share,
such peace I'd never known.
Of course, it couldn't last.
He was seized,

taken from us.
What can women do
but stand and watch
while they crucify him ?
I shall never touch him again
while there's life in his body
so let my last service
be to anoint him with myrrh,
in token of a love
surpassing understanding.

1995 revised 31 3 07 & 30 4 14



6 It is finished.

The Centurion

He was the Son of God.

Truly, he was !

How do I know ?

How can I say ?

We soldiers

are superstitious,

not religious,

but a friend of mine,

like me a centurion,

has a servant he likes

but the lad lay dying.

He sent Jewish 'friends'

to ask Jesus to heal his boy,

not to come to him

but simply command

the boy be cured –

as if angels were his to obey.

He did and he was !

You can't serve in Palestine

without having heard of Jesus.

Rumours are rife

but this much is clear:

he was a Rabbi
whose teaching drew crowds,
even in the countryside;
a miracle-worker who healed
the blind, the leper, the lame;
an exorcist who banished demons.

He was popular among his people,
loathed by Pharisees and Priests
and a puzzle to us as Romans.

Inevitably, Pilate condemned him –
a source of trouble,
innocent or not,
the verdict suits us all.

Dignified in death,
he died in pain,
naked,
nailed to a cross.

The eclipse ?

Coincidence ?

I can be rational:

I judge by what I see.

It's what I do each day
as I lead my men.

But what happened today
is beyond reason.

In a fight,
I act instinctively.
I don't think – I do !
Instinct keeps me alive !
That same instinct
tells me unequivocally
this man is special.
What more can I say ?
What more do you need ?

2 9 95 Revised 31 3 07 & 30 4 14



7 Father into thy hands I commit my spirit

Joseph of Arimathea

'Into your hands I commit my spirit.'

Even now, in death, how right you are
in the words of our evening prayer,
to entrust your soul to our Father's care.

Is for you to die our Father's will ?

Was there no other way to win ?

John the Baptist called you the Lamb of God
and today, on the Eve of Passover,

you are the lamb whose blood is shed for us
so the Angel of Death might pass us by.

You are the scapegoat of God's people,
the sacrifice for the sins of others.

Nicodemus told me of meeting you
and your extraordinary challenge to him,
that to live, one must be born again.

Is your death, then, a key to the new life ?

It seems to me our hope rests on you.

You have in word and deed taught us well,
shone light on the Law and the Prophets,
to help us understand the Word of God.

Yes, we have heard you with our ears,
you who have come to complete the Law.

Yes, we have seen you with our eyes,
you who have performed signs and wonders.

Yes, we accept you're the Son of David,
our Messiah, God's anointed one.

In just three days, you said,
you would rebuild the Temple.

Now may the temple that you are
by your death, be thus restored.

I, who have followed you in secret,
now must make myself known in public.

I must go beg your body of Pilate;
No doubt the Procurator of Judea
will want to wash his hands again of you.

We will take you down from the cross.

Mary will cradle you in her arms,
then we'll wash your body,
anoint you with myrrh,

wrap you in fine linen,
take you to a nearby garden
where we'll roll the stone away
from the entrance to my tomb,
and there lay you to rest.

In the light of your death,
what am I going to do ?

What will become of us ?

3 9 95 revised 1 4 07 & 30 4 14

