



St. Andrew's
Community Church

A large, dark silhouette of Jesus on the cross is positioned on the right side of the image. The background is a dramatic sky with a bright, glowing orange and yellow sun or light source behind the cross, creating a silhouette effect. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds. The overall mood is solemn and contemplative.

Lenten Study 2024

Words From the Cross



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Words From the Cross

Lent is a season of 40 days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and leads up to Easter. It is a time of **REPENTANCE, PRAYER** and **PREPARATION** where some followers of Jesus choose to **FAST** or give up something they enjoy or enjoy doing for the 40 days of Lent, to better focus that time, energy or money on God. Others choose to take up something new that helps them grow in their faith and reorient their lives towards God. Whether you choose to give something up, start something new, or both, our prayer is that we will all **GROW IN OUR FAITH** together during this season of Lent, as we intentionally take time for reflection and self-examination.

One way this is accomplished is through intentional time spent in the **WORD OF GOD**. Our Lenten study this year will be on what

has traditionally been called the **SEVEN LAST WORDS OF JESUS**. These final phrases taken from the four gospels were the words Jesus spoke from the cross as He was dying on Good Friday. Though these words are few, they provide a way to understand what is ultimately important to Jesus and they reflect the same tenderness, compassion, forgiveness and unconditional love that defined His life.

We encourage you to go through this study at **YOUR OWN PACE**. Rather than there being daily readings and reflection questions, this study will look at each of these seven phrases one week at a time. Feel free to spend a few minutes each day on these phrases or an extended amount of time one day a week. Additionally, we will look at these phrases in more depth on Wednesday nights at **MIDWEEK** and at our Good Friday service on March 29.

Blessings,



Rev. Josh Coats - Pastor of Discipleship

Week 1 (Feb. 14-20)

Father, forgive them...



Read Luke 23:32-38

- The first word Jesus spoke from the cross is Father. Why is that important?
- What name for God do you typically use when praying? Why?

- If you don't refer to God as Father, how might your faith be affected if you started addressing God that way? If you already do think of God as Father, what difference has that made in your faith and relationship with God?

- Forgiveness is an incredibly difficult topic for many of us. Some have a hard time forgiving others while others struggle with forgiving themselves or receiving forgiveness. Which word best describes forgiveness (forget, restore, release, let go)? Define forgiveness in your own words.

- In the midst of unimaginable cruelty and suffering, Jesus offers forgiveness. Who are the people Jesus is forgiving? Who is Jesus referring to when He says, “*forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing*”? The soldiers? The religious leaders? His disciples The crowd? You? All of the above?

- Who was most responsible for killing Jesus? What responsibility do we have in Jesus’ death on the cross?

- What does it mean to be forgiven by God? How does that make you feel?

- Are there any areas of your life where you need to repent and seek God's forgiveness? Read **Psalm 51** and offer it to God in prayer.

- Read **Psalm 103:8-12** and take time reflecting on the mercy and forgiveness God offers. What does the Psalm say about God's desire to forgive?

Week 2 (Feb. 21-27)

Today you will be with me in paradise...



Read Luke 23:39-43

- Why do you think one of the criminals crucified with Jesus insulted and mocked him? What human trait prompted him to do this?

- Why do you think the other criminal protested and rebuked him for his comments to Jesus? On what grounds does he try to stop him?

- What do you think the second criminal believed about Jesus that lead him to asking Jesus to remember him in His Kingdom?

- What are we supposed to learn from this exchange between Jesus and the second criminal? Based on this passage alone, what would you say is necessary for salvation?

- Jesus granted the request. What do you think Jesus meant when He talked about paradise?

- What do you currently believe about heaven?

- How do you feel when you think about heaven (hopeful, anxious, worried, confused, afraid, excited, etc.)?

- Many people think of heaven as some kind of an escape from reality or as the joy that can only be experienced after we've died. We tend to think of it as a mysterious place in the clouds, yet that is not what scripture describes at all. In the book of Revelation, we read about a new heaven and a new earth, where people don't ascend into the clouds to be with God, rather God descends to the new earth to be with His people. Read **Revelation 21:1-5** and reflect on how this description might differ from how you or others have thought about heaven.

- Heaven is not imaginary, but it is also in many ways an exercise of our imagination. Heaven is God's perfect creation where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain. When Jesus says, "*Today you will be with me in paradise,*" we can only imagine what that will be like. Has reading **Revelation 21:1-5** and reflecting on this perspective and description of heaven changed any of your thoughts about heaven? Why or why not?

Week 3 (Feb. 28-Mar. 5)

Dear woman, here is your son...



Read John 19:25-27

- Describe how you think Mary is feeling while she sits at the foot of the cross watching Jesus suffer and waiting for Him to die? What emotions might she be feeling? What thoughts are running through her mind?

- Jesus wasn't an only child (**Mark 6:1-6**). It would have been His brothers' responsibility to care for their mother after Jesus died. Why do you think Jesus didn't make them responsible and instead asked John?
- What does this third word from the cross teach us about Jesus? What, if any, are the implications of Jesus' third word for our own personal family relationships?

- What do you feel when you think about your family (happiness, joy, sadness, brokenness, etc.)? Take time reflecting on the number of family systems and groups you are a part of and the different feelings you have when you think of each.

- Jesus' relationship and teachings about family were very complex. Mary seemed to have been among those who were with Jesus throughout His life and ministry. Yet, in **Luke 14:26** Jesus says, *"If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple."* Clearly, Jesus isn't teaching us to hate our family. What does He mean in this passage?

- In the midst of Jesus' immense pain and suffering from the cross, He showed love and concern for His mother. He was also intentional about starting something new: a new family. As Jesus looks upon His mother for the last time, He calls His followers into a different way of understanding family. God's provision of family does not merely happen through genetics, but also through our faith in Jesus. How have you found family at church? What names and faces come to mind when you think about those in the church who have provided you wisdom and care in your life?

- In what ways can you provide family for someone else in need right now?

Week 4 (Mar. 6-12)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?



Read Mark 15:33-36

- How long was Jesus on the cross? In what ways did things seem to change mid-way through? (**Mark 15:25; Mark 15:33-34**)
- Why do you believe the sun stopped shining? Do you believe it signified anything?

- In what ways was Jesus forsaken or abandoned? Why must He be abandoned at this time?

- With Jesus' fourth phrase from the cross, He is not only uttering the pain of the present moment, but the suffering of experiencing forsakenness or abandonment. These words come from **Psalm 22**, which is a well-known Psalm of Lament. Lament is a form of prayer that is common in moments of suffering. These aren't nice little polite prayers, but real emotional pleas with God. Read **Psalm 22** and reflect on the psalmist's prayer of lament.

- What does it mean to suffer? Has there been a time in your life where you have suffered in some way? How did you overcome or cope with that suffering?
- At the end of **Psalm 22**, there is a turn toward finding hope in God. It is not a coincidence that in the midst of horrible suffering, Jesus quotes **Psalm 22** and offers a human cry that, when followed to its scriptural conclusion, leads to reassurance, life and joy for all humanity. In what ways might this give you hope during times of suffering?

- Because Jesus knew human suffering, He gets and understands us. We can turn to God in the midst of our own sufferings with confidence in God's care, understanding and love. If you are currently in a season of suffering, turn to God and take time to write your own prayer of lament.

Week 5 (Mar. 13-19)

I am thirsty.



Read John 19:28-29

- Have you ever been in need of something?
What was that like?

- What is the difference between wanting something and needing something?

- What do you thirst for (comfort, peace, loving relationships, justice, financial security, etc.)?
- Read **Psalms 63:1-3**. What does the psalmist say about thirst?
- Jesus may have been referring to **Psalms 69:21** when He says in order to fulfill scripture. Why was fulfilling scripture important to Jesus?


- One of the most difficult aspects of being human is having needs. In God choosing to become a person, He chose to have needs. Jesus saying, "*I am thirsty*" from the cross points to the full humanity of Jesus, the suffering that God went through in human form. What does it mean that God chose to become human, to have our same needs and temptations? How does that effect the way you think about and relate to Jesus?

- Why do New Testament authors put such a strong emphasis on Jesus' physical suffering? What difference would it make if Jesus was a divine person who didn't actually suffer on the cross? What difference would it make if Jesus was only a human being martyred on the cross?

- Read **Philippians 2:8-11**. This passage captures the essence of the mystery of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Just like us, Jesus thirsted – for water, peace, justice and love. Jesus experienced all the things we experience, yet in the end, His sacrifice on the cross paves the way to our salvation. Take time to reflect on this truth and the implications of it in your own life.

Week 6 (Mar.20-26)

Father, I entrust my spirit into Your hands.



Read Luke 23:44-49

- What do you hold most dear in life? What things do you spend the most time and/or money on or give the most attention to?

- Surrender is not easy to describe and is even more difficult to practice. It is an act of our will to lay aside our hopes, dreams, plans and desires in a complete submission to God. Jesus' words, "*Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands,*" highlights Jesus' faithful surrender to God's plan. Can you remember a time when you surrendered something to God? What was that like? What was lost and what was gained in that experience?
- Currently, is there anything you are feeling called to surrender to God (an old dream or plan, a situation or relationship, etc.)?

- What are some actions you can start taking now that will help you surrender one of these things to God?
- Read **John 10:11-18**. Sheep are fully dependent on their shepherd for food, shelter, protection, etc. In what ways has Jesus provided for you and protected you as your Good Shepherd who surrendered His life for His sheep?

- In **John 10:18**, Jesus says, “*No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily,*” and then He says from the cross in **Luke 23:46**, “*Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands,*” as He breathed His last breath. All the gospel writers agree in saying Jesus willingly and obediently gave up His life. None of them say He died – they say He laid down His life. Does that distinction matter? Why or why not?

- The temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religious life and was the place where animal sacrifices were carried out and worship according to the Law of Moses was followed. The curtain mentioned in **Luke 23:45** is the inner curtain in the temple of Jerusalem that separated the Holy of Holies (the earthly dwelling place of God's presence) from the Holy Place and the rest of the temple where humans dwelt (read **Hebrews 9:1-9**). This signified that sin separated humans from God (**Isaiah 59:1-2**). Only the high priest was permitted to pass beyond this curtain once a year (**Exodus 30:10 & Hebrews 9:7**) to enter the presence of God for all of Israel to make an atonement for their sins (**Leviticus 16**). The tearing of the curtain symbolizes that Jesus' sacrifice was a sufficient atonement for sins. It signified that now the Holy of Holies was open for all people, for all time.

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- Read **Hebrews 10:19-22** and take time to reflect on Jesus' sacrifice and our ability to now be able to approach God boldly. In what ways this week can you boldly approach God with a sincere heart fully trusting Him?

Week 7 (Mar.27-30)

It is finished.



Read John 19:30

- Have you ever left something incomplete? What were the reasons for not finishing? How does it feel to leave something unfinished?
- In the times where you have finished something that was difficult, reflect on what was required of you to finish? Obedience? Sacrifice? Hard work? Faithfulness? Patience?

- Imagine you were a follower of Jesus standing at the foot of the cross when He said, “*It is finished*”. What might have been going through your mind?
- What did Jesus come to accomplish? What was He saying was finished? What was required of Jesus to finish it?

- Throughout the Old Testament times, God used prophets to tell His people about God and about the Messiah who would come to fulfill God's plans. The Old Testament is full of these prophecies as well as instructions on how God's people needed to act as they patiently waited for the Messiah to bring peace and justice and make things right. Jesus came in a way nobody expected, lived a sinless life, and as He died a horrible death, cried out, "*It is finished*". Though, we have not seen the full fruition of God's plan, it has been fulfilled. God has triumphed over sin and death. In what ways has God triumphed over sin and death in your own life? How have you experienced the fulfillment of God's plans and in what ways have those plans yet to be fulfilled?

Join us for Holy Week & Easter!

- **Easter Hop Family Dance**

- Saturday, March 9 from 6:00 to 7:30 pm
- **Registration is now open.**



- **Holy Week Services**

- Maundy Thursday, March 28 @ 6:30 pm
- Good Friday, March 29 @ 6:30 pm

- **Easter Services**

- Saturday, March 30 @ 5:00 pm
- Sunday, March 31 @ 9:00 am
- Sunday, March 31 @ 10:30 am

If you can't join us in person, scan the QR code below to join us online for our livestream





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