

Meditations on the 7 words from the cross - Good Friday 2009

Meditation 1 - "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Yes they do Lord, of course they do!
They are crucifying you! Slowly, painfully, deliberately.
What do you mean "they don't know?"

I know they were only doing their job, ordinary blokes making a living, feeding their families, while they were crucifying you. But they tied you to the cross, drove in the nails and the spear, they drew your blood. They caused your suffering and pain, and death.

"Them". It is always their fault, someone elses'. "They did it, it was them who crucified you!" Not me.

But did they really know who you are? And would it have made any difference?
I don't know. Did they know?

Tell the truth, half the time I don't know what I am doing either – to other people, and to you. Do I really know the hurt I cause people and you in all sorts of ways?

Could "they" and "them" include me? Father, forgive me, for I do, but I don't really know what I am doing either. I do, but I don't have any idea how much my sins hurt other people and hurt you. I don't fully understand my part in your suffering and death. It is hard for me to understand that you went through all this because of me, on account of me, to forgive me. Forgive me for my ignorance, for my deliberate sins, and for my failure to forgive too.

And Father forgive "them", the people who have sinned against me, hurt me more than they will ever know or admit. We share that same pain, you and I, because they hurt you at the same time.

And Father give me the power to forgive them too. I need to, and sometimes want to but it's too hard sometimes. I guess I am at the right place though, watching your Son ask you to forgive both them and me... because we don't really know what we are doing to each other, and to you....

Jesus seems to be the only one who does know what he is doing, doing both for you and for us, and he is the one dying on the cross.....

Father forgive....

Meditation 2 - "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

"Paradise".

I like the sound of that word Lord.

Paradise - heaven, perfection, peace, rest, laughter, pure happiness. Nothing and no one to hassle me and make life miserable any more. Good times with good people forever.

But Lord, my idea of paradise doesn't include people like him – that thief, that terrorist on the cross next to you. How come he gets in, at the last minute, just like that? And all he did was look to you and...ask, ask you to "remember him". He had done nothing worthy of paradise and everything worthy of hell, and you give and promise him.....paradise. He hangs on a cross with you getting what he deserved for his miserable life and you tell him there is a place for him with you in paradise, and "today", the very day that you will die!

Is your heart, your love that big? Is God that gracious that someone like him could get into paradise with seconds to spare simply by admitting he deserved his punishment but looking to you on your cross to remember and save him?

I want to be in paradise too Lord, but perhaps my idea of paradise is too small after all. Mine would have less people in it than yours, people of my choosing. Maybe my understanding of your grace and love is even smaller. Sometimes I know I only think of paradise for selfish reasons – to escape the bad things about this life on earth. I don't always want paradise just to be with you forever but to escape my pain forever. I don't like to think about certain people being there either. Even my thoughts about heaven are not always holy thoughts, let alone my thoughts and words and actions in this life. And sometimes as I think about my sins I worry that I might not be welcomed either. I don't belong in a perfect world because I am so imperfect and would only muck it up.

Jesus, can I ask you a question? Will you remember me too, when you come... Will you forgive my sins too and take me to be with you...in paradise?

Meditation 3 - "here is your son," "Here is your mother."

That's just like you Lord...thinking of others when you are in such pain yourself. Making plans for the care of your loved ones. Thinking of your mum, thinking of your mate. Putting them together and asking them to care for each other as mother and son.

I feel like I am listening in to a private family conversation Lord, but not my family. She is not my mother and he is not my mate.

But you ask me to look after her too - the mother who comes to church grieving over a son or daughter or husband. The mother in the overseas aid brochure bringing up children on her own, with all those hungry mouths to feed. The mother whose skin is a different colour to mine and who speaks a different language. And you ask me to treat your mate as my mate, to watch out for him, encourage him, get alongside him in his losses and griefs. What would a church look like that took your words as if they were meant for us?

Lord you do ask us to look after each other since we can't see you, hear you and feel your arms around us. If we really did care for each other as if we were each other's mother and son, brother, sister and daughter, maybe the world will see your hands and hear your voice and experience something of you and your love at work in us...

Meditation 4 - "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Sometimes it seems like it Lord.

It seems like God has forsaken me. Abandoned me, isn't listening to me anymore. His ears seem blocked to my prayers. Bad things happen. Everything seems dark, and I feel alone, all alone in this world full of people. No one cares, everyone has rejected me, even God.

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

I am glad you said those words Lord, alone, in the dark, cut off by your Father in heaven. I am glad you felt and experienced total rejection..... You do understand what it's like, and more, and you went to that place of aloneness, abandonment, forsakenness, so that I may never have to imagine God hates me and has cut me off. You were forsaken so that I might know I am always embraced by God, even on my darkest day, my most alone and lonely day when I feel like despairing of life.

Sometimes in my sin I feel alone Lord, so unlovable, so forsaken. I feel I may have destroyed all fellowship with God. How could anyone think the thoughts I do? Some days you must hate me Lord. Some days I hate myself. And sometimes when things go wrong and I suffer I feel God is punishing me. Now I know he is not. I know that I, like your disciples have forsaken you, but I also now know that you were forsaken for me. Now I know God will never leave or forsake me.

Your words comfort me Lord, especially when it is dark and I can't see God and his love anymore. You cry out with me and for me in the dark. Even there, especially there, you are with me and loving me. Help me to never forget that.

Meditation 5 - "I am thirsty"

I'm not surprised you were thirsty Lord....so many hours since you last ate or drank, sweating drops of blood in the garden, up all night, under so much stress, such a beating, then the nails, and the spear in your side....hanging there exposed to the midday sun.

I am thirsty too Lord, and I drink, perhaps a bit too much Lord, I drink of things that don't ever seem to satisfy my thirst for them. Money, alcohol, sex and other pleasures of this life. They are good Lord, they take the pain of living away for awhile but they don't satisfy the dryness in my soul. I thirst for love, for belonging, for freedom, for life. But I often feel the well is dry deep inside, and it hasn't rained for a long time.

Lord you allowed yourself to dry up, to thirst.

You poured yourself out there to the last drop of blood and life for me, for us.

You lived out the words of scripture: "My strength is gone, dried up like water spilt on the ground, my throat is as dry as dust" (Psalm 22:14) ... "when I was thirsty they offered me vinegar" (Psalm 69:21)

They offered you a drink, a bitter drink.

I think I need a drink too Lord, after watching you suffer like this. Not a pain or mind-numbing drink, but a life giving and life sustaining drink.

I need what only you can give me to satisfy the thirst in my soul.

I need that life giving water from the bottomless well that you once offered a woman, the life-giving water that you are and the Spirit you have to give. I need to drink from my baptism.

I guess I also need Holy Communion, your body and blood poured out, shed for the forgiveness of my sins. Forgive me when I don't drink of you often like you told us to, when I don't thirst enough for that drink and imagine I can live without it, without you.

"I am thirsty"

Help me to drink of you, often until that day when you promise we will thirst no more but will share in the new wine with you in heaven.

Meditation 6 - "It is finished"

What is finished?

Is it your suffering, your pain, your dying? Is that nearly all over, finished? I hope so Lord, for your sake. I can't stand seeing people in pain, suffering. I wish it was finished.

Watching you die I can almost understand people wanting to end it all themselves, quickly, without more pain. Dying can be such hard work.

I am never finished Lord. Never finished my work, being a parent, the pile of things on my "to do list". And I can never make up for what I haven't done for you that I should have or make up for what I should not have done.

It sounds like your work is finished, the work you were sent to do, the work of taking all the things we have ever done wrong and left undone, on yourself, and suffering and dying for it, for us. You have finished doing what I could never do. You finished living your perfect life of loving obedience and faithfulness for me. You finished all the suffering that was necessary for God to justly deal with my sins. If I might say so "a job well done Lord." A job I could never have attempted or done. No matter how incomplete or unfinished or imperfect, no matter what mess I have created with my life, you offer your finished life and death for me to the Father. Thankyou for going through it all to the very end, for finishing what you came to do for me.

Lord you still have unfinished business – with me. I want to be more like you, forgiving, loving, faithful, courageous, believing... so don't stop working on me and in me until you are finished also with me, that one day too I may be everything you want me to be for you.

It is finished. It is all over and done with, your pain, suffering and anguish. And I am glad it is finished – for your sake ..and for mine. Thank God, it is finished!

Meditation 7 - "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"

I wish I could die like that - with complete confidence, security, inner peace and trust.

Some days I would be happy to die, to be with you, to enjoy life in the heaven you promise. But often I am afraid to die. Afraid of how it might happen when my time comes,

afraid to leave the people I love behind, afraid of the dark, afraid of the grave, afraid of what happens next...afraid at the thought of hell, and afraid at the thought of meeting...God. I guess that's why I don't want to think about dying too much.

It was all so violent and ugly - your death, but you were so peaceful. Yours was a death with such dignity even though it was all so undignified. Evil thought it had crushed the life out of you but you gave up your Spirit willingly, and committed your last breath and your very life to your Father in heaven. You even died so well, so faithfully. Did you do that for me too, the very act of dying? Did you pass through that for me too, with me, as me? Did you even rob dying of its power to hurt me and make me so afraid? Did you hand over your spirit, your life, your last breathe for me. That's what your last words say to me.

Maybe I don't need to deny death, want to escape it, or fear it as much as I do. Because, if you will be there for me, with me, even then, even in the moments when I'm dying, and I can know that even there, especially there, no powers of darkness can harm me or take me away from you, then, maybe I can die well too, with God-given dignity no matter what the circumstances of my death, with peace, trust, a confident hope, and maybe even.....joy. If you were confident of your resurrection and it happened, I can close my eyes in death too with the same peaceful confidence.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit". Your last word was "spirit", breathe, life. May that be my last word too. Spirit, life. Life and breathe eternal. Life and breathe forever with you. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit, in life and in death.