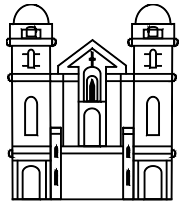


# DYING MAN'S WORDS



**Last Words from the Cross, music by Josef Haydn**

**GOOD FRIDAY 2017  
at St James the Greater  
with University of Leicester String Quartet**

**Soh-you Kim (violin, Guest Leader)**

**Kate Slip (violin)**

**Fiona Kuribashi-Coleman (viola)**

**Paul Jenkins (violoncello)**

**Welcome Reverend David H Clark, Officiant**

**Hymn:** Here hangs a man discarded, by Brian Wren (tune: Kocher AMNS 208)

Here hangs a man discarded,  
a scarecrow hoisted high,  
a nonsense pointing nowhere  
to all who hurry by.

Can such a clown of sorrows  
still bring a useful word  
when faith and love seem phantoms  
and every hope absurd?

Yet here is help and comfort  
for lives by comfort bound,  
when drums of dazzling progress  
give strangely hollow sound:

Life, emptied of all meaning,  
drained out in bleak distress,  
can share in broken silence  
our deepest emptiness;

And love that freely entered  
the pit of life's despair,  
can name our hidden darkness  
and suffer with us there.

Christ, in our darkness risen,  
help all who long for light  
to hold the hand of promise,  
till faith receives its sight

**Introduzione (String Quartet)**

## **The First Word**

And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'

### **Poem: The Soldier by Sylvia Sands**

Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.

I'm a soldier.

So I try not to listen when I hammer in the nails.

I try not to listen to what the condemned man may say.

Otherwise you lose your beauty sleep.

"Father, forgive them;  
they do not know what they are doing."

I've heard curses and threats and brave defiance,  
but never, never, as the hammer swung, concern for me.

At least that's what it seemed  
as I was shocked into meeting his eyes,  
the hammer heavy and stilled in my hand  
for one dreadful, ice-cold moment.

Through the blood and thorns and nails  
his eyes met mine with tenderness.  
Suddenly I wanted my mother and my wife  
And my gentle daughter  
To cradle my head in their laps  
And hide me, hide me, from this man's gaze.  
And here I am, throwing dice,  
with his words hammering,  
hammering in my head,  
hammering, hammering in my heart,  
like nails of love and forgiveness, and tenderness  
piercing me, piercing me,  
for all eternity.

**1<sup>st</sup> Sonata:** 1<sup>st</sup> Word of Jesus: *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do*

## **The Second Word**

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.'

And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

## **Poem: The Thief by Sylvia Sands**

A gibbet is a strange place  
to begin hope,  
but this man dying with me,  
caring for his executioners,  
caring for his mother,  
caring for his friend,  
this man gives hope.

A gibbet is a strange place  
to find faith,  
but this man sarcastically labelled  
the King of the Jews,  
dying regally,  
dying purposefully,  
dying with me,  
this man inspires faith.

A gibbet is a strange place  
to feel loved,  
but this man dying with me,  
promising Paradise,  
promising Paradise,  
from a place of integrity and agony,  
this man,  
as sure as I'm dying,  
will not stop loving even me.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sonata:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Word of Jesus: *Today you will be with me in Paradise*

### **The Third Word**

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. (John 19:25-27)

**Hymn:** Mary, blessed grieving mother by Michael Forster (Tune: Irby AMNS 46)

Mary, blessed grieving mother,  
waiting by the cross of shame,  
through your patient, prayerful vigil,  
kindle hope's eternal flame;  
crying in the pains of earth,  
singing of redemption's birth.

Where the crosses of the nations  
darken still the noonday skies,  
see the sad madonna weeping  
through a million mothers' eyes.  
Holy Mary, full of grace,  
all our tears with yours embrace.

Standing with the suffering Saviour,  
still oppressed by hate and fear,  
where the gentle still are murdered  
and protesters disappear:  
mother of the crucified,  
call his people to your side!

Holy mother, watching, waiting,  
for the saving of the earth;  
in the loneliness of dying,  
speak of hope and human worth,  
there for all the world to see,  
lifted up at Calvary!

### **Poem: The Mother by Sylvia Sands**

Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near he, Jesus said to her, "Woman, this is your son." Then to the disciple he said, "This is your mother." From that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home,

People are kind.  
Come away, they cry.  
No need to put yourself through this.  
He'll understand.

But I am his mother,  
and though the nails pierce his body,

and a sword sunders my soul,  
I must stand with him,  
I must stand by him,  
I must stand up in this his hour of dying.

And yet, and yet,  
there's more at stake than that.

From somewhere within  
this horror of great darkness,  
Gabriel-haunted still,  
I dream dreams, hear voices, see visions.  
I see others.

Mothers, sons, brothers, daughters,  
sisters, fathers, friends, lovers,  
a vast army who will not turn away;  
clad in the armour of fidelity  
and hollow-eyed courage,  
they will stand by,  
stand with,  
stand up,  
in those slow, dimming,  
dove-grey hours of dying ...

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sonata:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Word of Jesus: *Woman, behold your Son. Behold your mother.*

### **The Fourth Word**

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.  
And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lama  
sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me.' (Matt  
27: 45-46)

### **Poem: Mary of Magdala by Sylvia Sands**

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

I have been waiting  
(remembering all the little demons

Peeping out from behind my eyes),  
I have been waiting  
To hear him speak my name,  
Mary,  
Mary of Magdala.

My God, my God why have you abandoned me?  
Now I know he will not,  
Will not speak my name.  
For this God-forsaken cry  
is specially for me,  
standing God-forsaken  
at the foot of his cross.

When did he and !  
need things spelt out between us?

So I know this worst cry in all the world,  
is for me.

For I am not calm, like his mother,  
or comforted, like that thief,  
or trembling on the brink of faith,  
with that blood-stained centurion,  
or purposeful, like John.

Oh no.

I stand  
in the utter black-flamed darkness of despair –  
but closer, closer than them all,  
to his broken, God-forsaken heart.

**4<sup>th</sup> Sonata:** 4<sup>th</sup> Word of Jesus: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

### **The Fifth Word**

After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the Scripture),  
'I thirst.' A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the  
vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. (John 19:28-29)

**Hymn:** A body broken on a cross, by Brian Wren (tune: Melita, AMNS 292) )

A body, broken on a cross,  
with watching women's helpless grief,  
and men in heedless, headlong flight,  
through fear, despair or disbelief —  
in this, though still we find it strange,  
are life, and hope, and power to change.

A people weaponless and weak,  
not many wealthy, great or wise,  
but women, laborers and slaves,  
absurd to Greek and Roman eyes,  
their Caesar's rages could forgive,  
out-die, out-suffer, and out-live.

And still today, abroad, at home,  
from suburb or from shanty-town,  
the Spirit's new, surprising word,  
in ours or other faiths, or none,  
our sad routines will disarrange  
with gospel-hope of power to change.

When disillusion chains our feet  
and might and money turn to dust,  
when exile, desert or defeat  
have left us nothing else to trust,  
at last our spirit understands  
the strength of peaceful, nail-scarred hands.

A nation drifting in decline  
can turn to just and loving ways,  
and people empty, bruised, ashamed,  
can find rebirth to joy and praise,  
and churches, wakened, can exchange  
a huddled death for power to change.

## Poem: The Mother by Sylvia Sands

I thirst.

Always he was always thirsty.  
In the star-filled stable  
surrounded by the milk of human kindness  
he drank deep.

In the howling, beast-filled wilderness,  
finding streams in the desert,  
always he was thirsty.

Thirsty for joy and laughter,  
and wedding jokes,  
tricks of turning water into wine,  
throwing his head back, laughing.

Always – he was always thirsty.

Thirsty for friendship  
from fisherman and freedom fighters,  
from tax collectors and harlots,  
from rich young men and serious young women,  
from children,  
and from beggars at the roadside.

Always he was thirsty.  
And now his thirst fills the whole world,  
and waters its broken heart, slowly, slowly,  
with nothing but his own red blood.

While I, his mother,  
hearing a child's cry in the night,  
Mummy, I'm thirsty,  
cannot move, cannot reach his lips,  
cannot change the wine into water,  
but am rooted, rooted helpless to the rock.

**5<sup>th</sup> Sonata:** 5<sup>th</sup> Word of Jesus: *I thirst.*



## **The Sixth Word**

When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, 'It is accomplished'; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30)

### **Poem: The Disciple by Sylvia Sands**

It is accomplished!

What are the words behind the words?

We vied among ourselves

to understand him,

I, John,

and Peter,

and James.

But I cannot lay my head on his breast now,

and ask him gently,

What are the words behind the words?

Here in the darkness,

I grope to see

the mountain he has climbed above Calvary,

the miles walked by his paralyzed feet,

the peace won by his violent wounds,

the wisdom and dignity gained in thorn-filled contempt;

the millions already sheltered in his outreached arms.

Here in the darkness,

I, John, am praying,

Oh, what are the words behind the words

on Calvary?

**6<sup>th</sup> Sonata:** 6<sup>th</sup> Word of Jesus: *It is finished.*

## **The Seventh Word**

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father into thy hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last.

[Haydn's meditation on the 7<sup>th</sup> word is followed immediately by his musical representation of the earthquake. I have printed the account in St Matthew's

Gospel of the earthquake\* which he says accompanied Jesus' death. You would think that such a dramatic event would be reported in the other gospels as well, but I think that, historically true or not, Matthew is underlining the earth-shaking nature of the death of Jesus and the continuation of its influence into our era 2,000 years later. But now we hear Sylvia Sands' poem on the 7<sup>th</sup> word, from the point of view of the soldier at the foot of the cross.]

**Poem: The Soldier by Sylvia Sands**

Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit.

I am not easily impressed –  
and I *have* seen men die with courage before.

But in these last hours,  
it has seemed as if the whole world  
has been pivoting around this central cross,  
and turned completely upside down.

Thieves have spoken with the voices of children;  
the learned have been transformed into mere fools;  
women have stood resolutely upright like warriors;  
violent men like me have sunk gently to their knees.

He who should be powerless,  
pinned to his cross,  
has taken control,  
has taken heaven by storm,  
has taken my breath away  
in his final trustful prayer.

\*Matthew 27: 50-54: Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this was the son of God."

And I,  
on my knees in the dust,  
am forced to say,  
rejoice to say,

this man was son of God,  
this man was prince of peace.

**7<sup>th</sup> Sonata:** 7<sup>th</sup> Word of Jesus: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*

## **II Terramoto** (The earthquake)

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.**

**Hymn:** When I survey the wondrous cross (AMNS 67)

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God!

All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson, like a robe,  
Spreads o'er His body on the tree;  
Then I am dead to all the globe,  
And all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

The Lord be with you: **and also with you.**  
Go in the peace of Christ: **Thanks be to God.**

The poems by Sylvia Sands and the two hymns by Brian Wren are from *Darkness Yielding: Liturgies, Prayers and Reflections for Christmas, Holy Week and Easter*, 2009, by [Jim Cotter](#), Martin Percy, Sylvia Sands and Rowan Williams, used by permission of Canterbury Press. Other hymns printed under licence from CCLI.

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