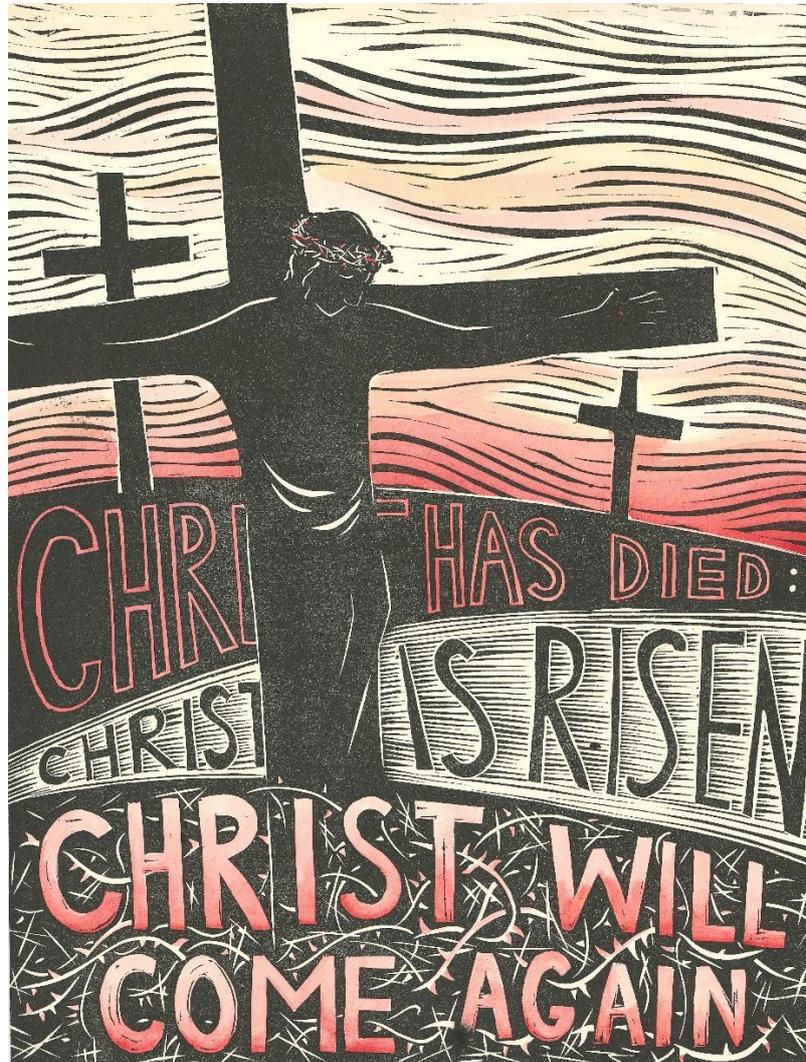


**Seven Last Words**  
**A Meditation on Good Friday in Words**  
**and the Music of Joseph Haydn**



**Performed by the**  
**University of Leicester String Quartet**  
**Readings by the Reverend Andrew Quigley**

**2 pm Good Friday, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022**  
**The Church of St James the Greater**  
**London Road, Leicester**

Our thanks go to the University of Leicester String Quartet for coming together to play for us this Good Friday

**The Knighton String Quarter:**

Simon Chalk (First Violin)

Chris Roberts (Second Violin)

Kaushik Ganeshan (Viola)

Paul Jenkins (Cello)

The poems by Sylvia Sands 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.

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**Introduction:** The Reverend Andrew Quigley

**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.

The First Word of Jesus: *"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

### **The First Sonata**

#### **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.

The Second Word of Jesus: *"Today you will be with me in Paradise."*

### **The Second Sonata**

#### **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)

#### **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 ...

The Third Word of Jesus: *“Woman, behold your Son. Behold your mother.”*

### **The Third Sonata**

### **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.’  
(Matthew 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 I  
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.

The Fourth Word of Jesus: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

### **The Fourth Sonata**

### **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)

## 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.

The Fifth Word of Jesus: "*I thirst.*"

### **The Fifth Sonata**

### **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?

The Sixth Word of Jesus: "*It is finished.*"

## **The Sixth Sonata**

### **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.

### **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.

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.

The Seventh Word of Jesus: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*

## **The Seventh Sonata**

Haydn's meditation on the seventh word is followed immediately by his musical representation of the earthquake. Below you'll find 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 whether, 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.

**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."

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

### **When I Survey The Wondrous Cross**

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 am I dead to all the globe,  
and all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
that were an 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.**

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