

February 26, 2023

Pastor Joe Hess

Study Guide



Famous Last Words

The First and Second Words of Jesus from the Cross

Our theme for this Lent season is “Famous Last Words” – and these are Jesus’ last words as recorded in the Gospels from the cross. There’s seven last words or phrases that Jesus speaks from the cross. Starting on Ash Wednesday and then each Sunday between now and Easter we’re going to focus on one of the seven last words.

Often times these seven last words of Jesus are woven into a Good Friday service – the Friday before Easter – and we call the service a Tenebrae service – or a Service of Darkness. (Tenebrae is Latin for darkness.) Scripture tells us that on the day Jesus was crucified - a darkness came over the land from noon to 3 PM. The Tenebrae service is a powerful service – and we’ve done that several times over the past few years. Part of that service – after the reading of each word – a candle is extinguished, and the sanctuary progressively gets darker and darker until it’s totally dark....when the last candle is extinguished.

From John’s gospel – “**In him (Jesus) was life and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness and darkness has not overcome it.**” On that first Good Friday – when Jesus breathed his last - it looked like darkness had overcome it – it looked like darkness had won. We know on that first Easter morning – darkness had not won – and we’ll celebrate that again on Easter morning this year. This Lent season – we’re going to ask folks to remember the darkness of that first Good Friday afternoon.

Ash Wednesday’s Word – Jesus’ First Word

Luke 23:32-34

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, “**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Today’s Word - Jesus’ Second Word

Luke 23: 35-43

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “**Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.**”

Ice Breaker Questions:

Do you have a favorite quote or a favorite line from a movie?

Why do you connect with this quote or line?

Thoughts & Questions to Fuss With:

Jesus' First Word: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

1. Joe often jokes that one of his spiritual gifts is holding a grudge. It's funny until it's not funny. Why is it so hard for most of us to forgive?

Can you share a time when it was difficult for you to forgive?

2. Can we forgive people that have hurt us even if they haven't asked for forgiveness?
3. The line from the Lord's Prayer – "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." This part of the Lord's prayer seems to ask our heavenly Father to forgive us – but we also have a responsibility to forgive those who have hurt us. Do you think Jesus is teaching us – "you're forgiven – but only if you forgive"?
4. In this "First Word" – Jesus prayer to the Father from the cross for us, how are we called to respond to this?

Why is this prayer for us hard to understand? Have you ever prayed a prayer similar for someone?

Jesus' Second Word: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

1. Joe talks about "Bids for Connection" (the different ways we reach out to connect with each other) and that we can respond to these bids in one of three ways: 1. Towards; 2. Away (or neutral); or 3. Against. This past week can you think of a time someone in your life made a bid for connection to you and you responded – towards?

Can you think of a time you responded – Away or Against?

2. How has God been asking you to make a Bid for Connection to someone and you've been hesitant?

Why are we hesitant to make bids for connection with folks?

3. Joe talks about God's ultimate bid for connection to us was Jesus dying on the cross for us 2,000 years ago. Can you share the first time you really turned toward Jesus with your whole heart?

How about the last time you turned toward Jesus fully?

4. This gospel story tells us the folks at the foot of the cross did this towards Jesus: the people watched; the religious leaders jeered; the soldiers (or police of the day) mocked; and the one criminal insulted. I know this is almost sacrilegious, but if you were Jesus – which action towards you would have hurt the most and why?

Which action hurt Jesus the most?

5. Can you share a time in your life when you acted towards Jesus in one of these ways?

6. Assuming God's ultimate bid for connection to us was in and through Jesus' dying on the cross – what surprises you about the one criminal turning towards Jesus?

Does he only turn towards Jesus because he's desperate – or is there more to his appeal: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom?" Fuss with that some.