

***THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF CHRIST***  
**Joseph Haydn**

Texts prepared by Alan Jones, Dean Emeritus, Grace Cathedral  
Good Friday 2019

*Introduzione in D minor — Maestoso ed Adagio*

*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*

We would rather be ruined than changed  
We would rather die in our dread  
Than climb the cross of the moment  
And see our illusions die.

“I don’t think in terms of being an atheist or not. I would just say that we live in a mystery, and the making of this world is simply great and mysterious. I was listening, just this morning, to a man talking about finding rocks that were four billion years old. So we live in mystery. I’m not unsatisfied with that. I don’t have to find a god or not a god. There’s a quote – I don’t remember who said it – “Find me a god because I am full of prayers.” I think my husband could be described this way. He’s an old Episcopalian boy. He has lost his god but I think he’s full of prayers. I’m not full of prayers. I’m full of language.”

— Grace Paley, *Inches of Progress*

WHAT THE OLD CHEYENNE WOMEN AT SAND CREEK KNEW  
(Sand Creek Massacre: November 29, 1864)

All along the creek bank  
they crouched holding the children  
until the last warrior was dead  
and the soldiers turned slowly towards them  
like men in a bad dream.  
The old women knew what was coming.  
All along the creek bank  
they tore off their shawls,  
their shirts, their scarves,  
anything close at hand  
and they covered the eyes of the children.  
The old women knew that if young children  
saw what men in a bad dream could do  
they would not die a clean death  
so they covered the eyes of the children  
and made no move to run.  
The old women knew it was time.  
All along the creek bank  
they sat with their eyes wide open  
watching and rocking the swaddled children  
and when the soldiers opened fire

they tumbled into the creek,  
the dead children in their arms  
with eyes covered  
so they would not see  
what men in a bad dream could do.  
All along the creek bank  
The old women knew how to move  
from one dream to another  
And take the children safely through;  
the old women knew  
what men in a bad dream could do.

AND jump from 1864 to 1917:

G. A. Studdert Kennedy, a chaplain in WW1: “On June 7th, 1917, I was running to our lines half mad with fright, though running in the right direction, thank God, through what had once been a wooded copse. It was being heavily shelled. As I ran I stumbled and fell over something. I stopped to see what it was. It was an undersized, underfed German boy, with a wound in his stomach and a hole in his head. I remember muttering, ‘You poor little devil, what had you got to do with it? not much “great blonde Prussian” about you.’ Then there came light. It may have been pure imagination, but that does not mean it was not also reality, for what is called imagination is often the road to reality. It seemed to me that the boy disappeared and in his place there lay Christ upon the cross, and cried, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my little ones ye have done it unto me.’ From that moment on I never saw a battlefield as anything but a crucifix. From that moment on I have never seen the world as anything but a crucifix.”

*Pater, dimitte illis, quia nesciunt, quid faciunt*

### *Sonata I in B-flat major — Largo*

*Today, you will be with me in paradise*

Once upon a time there was a holy rabbi who was granted a vision of the Last Judgment. He found himself in a courtroom. There before him was a table. On it were the scales of justice. There were also two doors and both of them were open. Through one he could see the light of Paradise, through the other the darkness of Hell. It was the Day of Judgment and the human race was on trial.

The defense counsel entered the courtroom carrying a little bundle of good deeds under his arm. It had not been a great year for good deeds. Next, the chief prosecutor came in with two assistants. Each of them carried an enormous sack of sins. They were bent over with their sheer weight. Dropping their sacks before the scales of justice, they took a deep breath, and went back for more. “This isn’t even a tenth of it,” they said, as they dragged in more sacks. The defense counsel, whose tiny bundle of good deeds was beginning to look pathetic next to the great pile of sins sitting on the floor, buried his head in his hands and sighed.

Just outside the door to Paradise someone was listening. It was Levi Yitzhak of blessed memory. When he was on earth he had sworn that not even in death would he forget the plight of struggling humanity. When he heard the sigh of the defense counsel, he decided to slip into the court room. Seeing the tiny bundle of good deeds next to the huge sacks of sins, he didn’t take long to size up the

situation. He decided on a plan of action. He waited until there was a recess. Left alone in the court room, he began to drag the sacks of sins, one at a time, to the door leading to Hell. It took all his strength and a great deal of time to throw them in one by one. He was almost finished — in fact he was holding the very last sack — when the prosecutors and the defense counsel returned. Rabbi Yitzhak was caught red-handed. He did not deny what he had done. How could he? He had thrown always the sins so that the good deeds would outweigh the bad.

Since the court was bound to uphold the law, the chief prosecutor demanded justice. “It is written that a thief shall be sold for his theft. Let Levi Yitzhak be sold at auction right now in this court room! Let’s see if anyone will bid for him!”

By now the demons from hell and the angels from heaven had heard all the commotion in the court room and they came to watch the two parties lined up beside the scales of justice. The bidding began. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob threw their good deeds onto the scales and the Matriarchs added theirs. In fact all of the righteous contributed what they could. But the dark forces were able to gather up unnumbered sins stored in the deep places of the earth. The scale on their side went down and down and down. Rabbi Yitzhak was doomed. His crime had been to throw away the sins of the world so that we could be forgiven. “I buy him!” said the chief prosecutor, and dragged him to the door leading to the great darkness.

Just then, above the court room, from the Throne of Glory itself, came a voice. “I buy him!” There was a great silence. And God spoke, “I buy him. Heaven and Earth are mine, and I give them all for Levi Yitzhak — Levi who would have me forgive my children.\*

*Amen! Dico tibi, hodie mecum eris in paradiso*

*Sonata II in C minor, ending in C major — Grave e cantabile*

*Woman, behold your son!*

By the cross her vigil keeping  
Stands the queen of sorrows weeping,  
    While her son in torment hangs;  
Now she feels — O heart afflicted  
By the sword of old predicted  
    More than all a mother’s pangs.

Who, Christ’s mother contemplating  
In such bitter anguish waiting,  
    Has no human tears to shed?  
Who would leave Christ’s mother, sharing  
All the pain her son is bearing,  
    By those tears uncomforted?

I am the Great Sun, but you do not see me.  
I am your husband, but you turn away.  
I am the Captive, but you do not free me.  
I am the Captain you will not obey.  
I am the Truth, but you will not believe me.

I am the City where you will not stay.  
I am your wife, your child, but you will leave me.  
I am the God to whom you will not pray.  
I am your Counsel, but you do not hear me.  
I am that Lover whom you will betray.  
I am the victor, but you do not cheer me.  
I am the Holy Dove whom you will slay.  
I am your life, but if you will not claim me  
Seal up your soul with tears and never blame me.

*Mulier, ecce filius tuus, et tu, ecce mater tua!*

*Sonata III in E major — Grave*

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

Shusako Endo's novel, *The Silence of God* is about 17th century Japanese martyrs. The narrator watches two men bound to the stake as the tide of the sea comes in over them — until they die exhausted. "What do I want to say? I myself do not understand. Only that today, when for glory of God Mokichi and Ichizo moaned, suffered and died, I cannot bear the monotonous sound of the dark sea gnawing at the shore. Behind the depressing silence of this sea, the silence of God ... the feeling that while men raise their voices in anguish God remains with folded arms, silent."

And:

Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, "Blowing through heaven and earth, and in our hearts and the heart of every living thing, is a gigantic breath — the great Cry — which we call God. Plant life wished to continue its motionless sleep next to the stagnant waters, but the Cry leaped within it and violently shook its roots; 'Away, let go of the earth, walk!' Had the tree been able to think and judge, it would have cried, 'I don't want to. What are you urging me to do? You are demanding the impossible!' But the Cry, without pity kept shaking its roots and shouting, 'Away, let go of the earth, walk!' It shouted in this way for thousands of eons." The Cry we resist! The Cry of life being wrenched out of us. The Cry of "yes!"

*Eli! Eli! lama asabachthani (Deus meus, Deus meus, utquid dereliquisti me)*

*Sonata IV in F minor — Largo*

*I thirst!*

Grahame Greene's Monsignor Quixote had a dream: Christ had been saved from the Cross. There was no final agony, no stone to be rolled away. He just stepped down from the Cross to the cheering crowd. A happy ending. "There was no ambiguity, no room for doubt and no room for faith at all. The whole world knew for certainty that Christ was the Son of God. It was only a dream, of course, only a dream but nonetheless Father Quixote has felt on waking the chill of despair felt by a man . . . who must continue to live in a kind of Saharan desert without doubt or faith, where everyone is

certain that the same belief is true. He had found himself whispering, ‘God save me from such a belief.’”

*Sitio!*

*Sonata V in A major — Adagio*

*It is finished!*

A memory of Kreisler once:  
At some recital in this same city,  
The seats all taken, I found myself pushed  
On to the stage with a few others,  
So near that I could see the toil  
Of his face muscles, a pulse like a moth  
Fluttering under the fine skin,  
And the indelible veins of his smooth brow.  
I could see, too, the twitching of the fingers,  
Caught temporarily in art’s neurosis,  
As we sat there or warmly applauded  
This player who so beautifully suffered  
For each of us upon his instrument.

So it must have been on Calvary  
In the fiercer light of the thorn’s halo:  
The men standing by and that figure  
The hands bleeding, the mind bruised but calm,  
Making such music as lives still.  
And no-one daring to interrupt  
Because it was himself that he played  
And closer that all of them the God listened.

The shepherds’ hovels shone, for underneath  
The soot we saw the stone clean at the heart  
As on the starting day. The refuse heaps  
Were grained with that fine dust that made the world;  
For he had said, ‘To the pure all things are pure.’  
And when we went into the town, he with us  
The lurkers under doorways, murderers,  
With rags tied round their feet for silence, came  
Out of themselves to us and were with us  
And those who hide within the labyrinth  
Of their own loneliness and greatness came,  
And those entangled in their own devices,  
The silent and the garrulous liars, all  
Stepped out of their dungeons and were free.

*Consummatum est!*

*Sonata VI in G minor, ending in G major — Lento*

*Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit*

Poet Wilfred Owen trained young men for the Front. He wrote to Osbert Sitwell — July 1918 — “I see to it that he is dumb, and stands to attention before his accusers. With a piece of silver I buy him everyday, and with maps make him familiar with the topography of Golgotha.” Here’s the poem.

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,  
And took the fire with him, and a knife.  
And as they sojourned both of them together,  
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,  
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,  
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?  
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,  
and builded parapets and trenches there,  
And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.  
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,  
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,  
Neither do anything to him. Behold,  
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;  
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.  
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,  
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

Yet we still call this Friday good for the mystery of mercy it accomplishes in us.

William Langland wrote: “And all the wickedness in the world that man might work or think is no more to the mercy of God than a live coal dropped into the sea.”

*Pater! In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum!*

*Sonata VII in E-flat major — Largo*

Peter Abelard who had suffered terrible misfortunes is walking in the woods with his friend Thibault. They hear a piercing cry of pain. They run and find a rabbit caught in a trap. “O God, let it die. Let it die quickly.” Thibault releases it from the trap and Abelard holds the wounded creature in his arms, where it dies.

It was that last confiding thrust that broke Abelard's heart. He looked down at the little dragged body, his mouth shaking. “Thibault,” he said, “do you think there is a God at all? Whatever has come to me, I earned it. But what did this one do?”

Thibault nodded. “I know,” he said. “Only — I think God is in it too.” Abelard looked up sharply. “In it? Do you mean that it makes Him suffer, the way it does us?” Again Thibault nodded, “Then why doesn't He stop it?”

"I don't know," said Thibault. "Unless — unless it's like the Prodigal Son. I suppose the father could have kept him at home against his will. But what would have been the use? All this," he stroked the limp body, "is because of us. But all the time God suffers. More than we do."

Abelard looked perplexed . . . "Thibault, do you mean Calvary?" Thibault shook his head. "That was only a part of it — the piece that we saw in time. Like that." He pointed to a fallen tree beside them, sawn through the middle. "That dark ring there, it goes up and down the whole length of the tree. But you see only where it is cut across. That is what Christ's life was; the bit of God that we saw. And we think God is like that, because Christ was like that, kind and forgiving sins and healing people. We think God is like that forever, because it happened once, with Christ. But not the pain. Not the agony at last. We think that stopped. . . Then, Thibault," [Abelard] said slowly, "you think that all this, . . . all the pain of the world, was Christ's cross?"

"God's cross," said Thibault. "And it goes on."

"The Patripassian heresy," muttered Abelard mechanically, "But, O God, if it were true. Thibault it must be. At least, there is something at the back of it that is true. And if we could find it — it would bring back the whole world."

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*The Lesson of the Moth*, Don Marquis — Archy, the cynical and disillusioned cockroach — tries to persuade a moth of the idiocy of trying to "Break into an electric light bulb and fry himself on the wires."

          it is better to part of beauty  
argued the moth,  
          for one instant and then cease to  
          exist than to exist for ever  
          and never be a part of beauty . . .  
          and  
records Archy,  
          before i could argue him  
          out of his philosophy  
          he went out and immolated himself  
  
          on a patent cigar lighter  
          i do not agree with him  
          myself i would rather have  
          half the happiness and twice  
          the longevity  
          but  
and here the cynic gives himself away  
          at the same time i wish  
          there was something i wanted  
          as badly as he wanted to fry himself.

T.S. Eliot:

Who then devised the torment? Love.  
Love is the unfamiliar Name  
Behind the hands that wove  
The intolerable shirt of flame

Which human power cannot remove.  
We only live, only suspire  
Consumed by either fire or fire.

And finally, Wendell Berry:

#### THE MAD FARMER'S LIBERATION FRONT

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,  
vacation with pay. Want more  
of everything ready-made. Be afraid  
to know your neighbors and to die.  
And you will have a window in your head.  
Not even your future will be a mystery  
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card  
and shut away in a little drawer.  
When they want you to buy something  
they will call you. When they want you  
to die for profit they will let you know.  
So, friends, every day do something  
that won't compute. Love the Lord.  
Love the world. Work for nothing.  
Take all that you have and be poor.  
Love someone who does not deserve it.  
Denounce the government and embrace  
the flag. Hope to live in that free  
republic for which it stands.  
Give your approval to all you cannot  
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man  
has not encountered he has not destroyed.  
Ask the questions that have no answers.  
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.  
.....  
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.  
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful  
though you have considered all the facts.  
.....  
As soon as the generals and the politicians  
can predict the motions of your mind,  
lose it. Leave it as a sign  
to mark the false trail, the way  
you didn't go.  
Be like the fox  
who makes more tracks than necessary,  
some in the wrong direction.  
Practice resurrection.

*Il terremoto — the Earthquake*

*Il terremoto in C minor — Presto e con tutta la forza*