

Who heard the words?

Most Christians are aware of the last seven phrases that Jesus spoke from the cross. Often called Jesus' last words, thousands of theologians have pondered and written about their meaning. Throughout the ages, clergy have based sermons on these words, focused on demonstrating his sacrifice for humanity's sins.

During Lent, these words become especially meaningful. We approach Good Friday profoundly aware that a real man, a human being made of flesh and blood, had said these words. A man in excruciating agony, a man falsely accused and sentenced to the worst and most humiliating form of punishment and death.

The traditional order of the sayings is:

1. Luke 23:34: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.
2. Luke 23:43: Verily, I say unto you today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.
3. John 19:26–27: Woman, behold thy son. (Says to disciple) Behold thy mother.
4. Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34: My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?
5. John 19:28: I thirst.
6. John 19:30: It is finished.
7. Luke 23:46: Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.

We know these phrases well. Some of us heard them throughout our religious upbringing; others from the thousands of filmmakers throughout the world attempting to capture this moment in time.

Consider the physical state of this man. He had been scourged to the point of exhaustion. It is said that during floggings, the Roman soldiers stood in front and back of the prisoner as they administered their horrible punishment. The loss of blood from whips, tipped with steel balls, tearing through the skin would weaken even the most physically fit. The scourging alone made it impossible for Jesus to carry the beam of his eventual death. He could barely walk through the streets.

Once at Golgotha, after enduring the pain of foot-long spikes being driven through his flesh, the soldiers hoisted his body onto the cross, pulling his arms out of their sockets. Then they forced his legs together and drilled another spike through his feet, nailing them to the wood. Stripped naked, exhausted, weak, he hung there for hours, his life slipping away.

This is not a man who could have screamed these last words, at least not all of them, especially after enduring such excruciating pain. It is doubtful that he would have had enough breath left to speak above much more than a whisper.

Who heard those last words? The disciples had fled in fear; all the disciples. The crowds watched from a distance. Who would have been close enough to the cross, to his body, to hear them?

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (John 19:25)

It was Mary Magdalene who accompanied him to Jerusalem.

Mary who had stood at the foot of the cross and witnessed to those last hours of his life.

Mary, who followed his body and saw it wrapped and laid in the tomb. She, who watched the stone being rolled across its opening and saw the soldiers standing guard.

It was Mary who had kept vigil through the night and who had readied spices to prepare the corpse of Jesus.

She the first to find the stone removed and to hear the question of the two men in dazzling apparel asking her, "Why do you seek the dead among the living?"

It was Mary to whom Jesus spoke his first words after the resurrection... **her name.**

Then Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended. to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (John 20:17)

And Mary ran and found the eleven and told them: “*I have seen the Lord*” and proceeded to share all the things he had said to her.

Who else would have heard those last words from the cross except Mary Magdalene? Who more fitting than to tell this story, the last story of Jesus' earthly life, than her?

To her was given the first commission, the first to be told to spread the *good news*.

"Go tell the others." He had said.

And she did.

Dorothy Gibbons 2021