


Words That Last Forever



Forgive
Paradise
Behold
Forsaken
Thirst
Finished
Hands

A SERIES OF SPECIAL SERVICES FOR LENT
BY ARDEN W. MEAD

Words That Last Forever

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About Words That Last Forever

Let Jesus' Last Words ring out to a new generation of worshipers in Arden Mead's classic Lenten series, once again available in this new and expanded format.

Christ had no epitaph. Buried in a borrowed tomb, no words were emblazoned across his grave. Instead, during the final hours of his life, Christ mapped out his way of suffering with seven famous last words—seven final phrases, remembered and recited throughout the ages—tiny touchstones along his way of sorrows. We may find that these last words have a lasting impact, even now, for us.

The sermons can be delivered by three voices (for dramatic impact) or delivered by one voice as a monolog Sermon. Services for all seven Last Words are included (Ash Wednesday through Good Friday) ... plus a service for Maundy Thursday ("For you") and for Easter Sunday ("Alleluia!").

Nine sermons with complete worship services and children's sermons!

Files

Customize the services to meet your needs with the files in RTF format in this digital download. This PDF file is included in the digital download as well for easy printing of scripts, sermons, readings and orders of worship.

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Service One: FORGIVE!

Complete Script For Worship Leaders

- This **Opening Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the melody *Herzlich Tut Mich Verlangen* 76 76 D:

With words that last forever you speak in richest grace,
Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior, upon your cross disgraced.
With open ears I listen, with open mind believe,
With open heart embrace you: I, Lord, your words receive.

“Forgiveness” granted sinners, and “Paradise, today!”
“Behold your son, your mother!” to family you say.
The air is split with anguish in your “Forsaken” cry,
As “Thirsty,” work “Accomplished,” in “Father’s hands” you die.

Pray, sanctify the silence with which I contemplate
Your boundless love for sinners, your sacrifice so great,
Till at the tomb I waken to your new word for me:
These words, not last, but lasting, shall ring eternally!

- This litany, entitled **Approaching the Word**, is spoken responsively by the pastor and the congregation:

P Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

C “**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**”

P The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

C “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

P The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

C “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

P “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

C “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

P “The word that goes forth from my mouth shall not return to me empty,” says the Lord. “It shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

C “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

• This **Prayer of the Day**, or another of your choosing, is offered:

P O God of forgiveness, you are gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. You did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Create clean hearts in us, we pray. Cleanse us from our sin, that our joy may be complete. Then we will live in your light. Then these ashen souls will be ignited with your forgiving grace. Through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

• The **First Reading**, Joel 2:12-19, is read:

P Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, “Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’” Then the LORD became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people. In response to his people the LORD said: I am sending you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a mockery among the nations.

- This **Responsive Psalm** from Psalm 51:1-12 is spoken by the pastor and the congregation:

P Be merciful to me, O God, because of your constant love. Because of your great mercy wipe away my sins!

C **Wash away all my evil and make me clean from my sin!**

P I recognize my faults; I am always conscious of my sins.

C **I have sinned against you—only you—and done what you consider evil.**

P So you are right in judging me; you are justified in condemning me.

C **I have been evil from the day I was born; from the time I was conceived, I have been sinful.**

P Sincerity and truth are what you require; fill my mind with your wisdom.

C **Remove my sin, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.**

P Let me hear the sounds of joy and gladness; and though you have crushed me and broken me, I will be happy once again.

C **Close your eyes to my sins and wipe out all my evil.**

P Create a pure heart in me, O God, and put a new and loyal spirit in me.

C **Do not banish me from your presence; do not take your holy spirit away from me.**

P Give me again the joy that comes from your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.

- The **Second Reading**, 1 John 1:4-9, is read:

P We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- This verse of the **Theme Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the melody *Southwell SM*:

Our Savior speaks in love,
From deepest agony.
Oh, hear the message from above;
His great compassion see.

- The **Holy Gospel**, John 3:14-21, is read:

Ⓟ Jesus continued: “And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

- This brief **Children’s Sermon** may be delivered:

Ⓟ I have a secret to share with you. The secret is the second most powerful word in the whole world. Can you guess what it is? The word is “NO!”

“NO” is a powerful word. “NO” has the power to close doors, to end relationships, to turn people away, to destroy ideas, to hurt feelings, even to end lives.

Saying “NO” can make you feel powerful, indeed. Perhaps that’s why it’s one of the first words we use as toddlers. A tiny toddler isn’t very powerful, is she? But if she has the power of “NO,” then she suddenly becomes powerful. She can even use it against her (gasp!) OWN PARENTS! That’s POWER!

But I told you that “NO” is the SECOND most powerful word in the world. And let me tell you, it runs a DISTANT second to the most powerful word.

That word (can you guess it?) is “YES!” “YES” has the power to OPEN doors, to MAINTAIN and FEED friendships, to EMBRACE those around us, to CREATE ideas, to BUILD UP feelings, even to BRING NEW LIFE!

The word “FORGIVE” is really a way of saying “YES.” When we forgive someone, we are renewing our friendship with them, embracing them, inviting them in, giving them new life.

Sometimes we call Jesus, “The ‘YES’ of God.” By sending his Son, God is saying “YES” to all of his naughty children. He is FORGIVING us and giving us new, even eternal, life!

This Lent I want you to think about those two powerful words. I want you to say you’re sorry for all the “NO”s you use. I want you to grab on to God’s “YES” and to use it in your family and with your friends.

“YES!” It’s the most powerful word in the world. It is the WORD of God—Christ Jesus, his Son.

Let’s pray: Dear Lord, forgive all of the “NO-NO”s in our lives. We cling to your almighty “YES.” Amen.

- This verse of the **Theme Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the melody *Southwell SM*:

Our Savior speaks in grace
With words of mercy true:
“Forgive them, Father,” thus he prays;
“They know not what they do.”

- This **Sermon**, entitled “FORGIVE,” may be delivered by three voices or, if desired, may be delivered as a monolog:

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” —Luke 23:34

- 1 Epitaphs. Carved into stone, whittled into wood, burnished into bronze—they offer a tidy lasting message, readable long after bodies turn to dust and memories flicker and fade ...

2 ... *“Loving Mother, Faithful Wife.”*

3 ... ***“Honest Man of Business.”***

2 ... *“Suffer the Little Children to Come Unto Me.”*

3 ... ***“Gave His Life in the Defense of his Country.”***

2 ... *“Abides Forever in Light.”*

1 More than that, through poetry, Scripture and prose, epitaphs seek to sum up in one lasting package the life, the love, the work, the passion—the very purpose—of those for whom they stand.

Jesus Christ had no epitaph. Buried in a borrowed tomb, he had no words emblazoned on his grave. If there had been, what might they have read?

3 ... ***“Rabbi.”***

2 ... *“Beloved Son, Faithful Friend.”*

3 ... ***“Hardworking Carpenter, Itinerant Preacher.”***

2 ... *“Healer.”*

3 ... ***“Crucified, Died and Buried.”***

2 ... *“Enemy of the People.”*

1 But Christ had no epitaph. Instead, during the final hours of his life, Christ mapped out his way of suffering with seven famous last words—seven final phrases, remembered and recited throughout the ages—tiny touchstones along his way of sorrows.

This Lent, as we gather to make sense out of his wretched suffering, his senseless death,

3 ***our confusing lives, our miraculous relationship with him,***

1 we do so with these words as our guide.

2 *He died alone, in a way and under circumstances that we will never understand.*

1 Yet, these words provide tiny windows, tenuous glimpses into his suffering, loving, final thoughts. Listen to them. We may find that these last words have a lasting impact, even now, for us.

2 *“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”*

1 About whom was he talking?

2 *“They know not what they do.”*

1 Who are the people at the foot of the cross who “know not what they do”?

3 *The soldiers knew what they were doing:*

1 They were doing their job, their assignment, what they had been trained to do.

2 *“Let us divide his garments among us and cast lots for his robe.”*

1 Dirty work occasionally, but a job is a job, after all. Jobs are not always the most palatable things to do, I know, and sometimes we try to find ways to cover up the fact that someone has to do the dirty work.

3 *I’ve been in that spot, and so I know. The soldiers also knew what they were doing.*

2 *“They know not what they do.”*

3 *Pontius Pilate knew what he was doing too.*

2 *“This man has done nothing deserving death.”*

1 And yet the situation was such that he just HAD to do, well, what he HAD to do. He too tried to find some way to cover up what he was doing, sending Jesus to Herod, washing his hands, making other people say that they’re to blame.

2 *“His blood be on US, and on our children.”*

1 Pilate was doing what he felt could not be avoided. He did what he HAD to do.

3 *I’ve been in that spot too, and I knew what I was doing, wrong as I may have known it to be. Pilate knew too.*

2 *“They know not what they do.”*

3 *Herod knew what he was doing ...*

2 *“This man has done nothing amiss. I am returning him to you.”*

1 Ducking the issue, providing an answer by finding a way not to answer, and so seeking to cover up his own indecision by finding a way to shift the responsibility for action (or for lack of it) to someone else.

3 *I've been in that spot too, and I knew what I was doing. Herod knew too.*

2 *"They know not what they do."*

1 The religious leaders of the day knew what they were doing too: By finding ways to arrest Jesus, bring him to trial, stir up the crowds, twist Pilate's arm.

2 *"It is expedient that one man should die for the people."*

3 *The religious leaders knew what they were doing.*

1 Eliminating an obstacle, an embarrassment, an inconvenience to what they had planned as the "proper" way things should be done, and covering over their real deed by finding a "right, proper, holy" way of handling the situation.

3 *I've done that kind of thing myself, and I knew what I was doing, and they did too.*

2 *"They know not what they do."*

3 *Simon Peter knew what he was doing when he denied his Lord, despite the warnings he received.*

2 *"Before the cock crows twice, three times you will deny me."*

1 Peter was saving his own hide, hoping words would work where force had failed, covering his tracks at best, or maybe covering his own tail.

3 *I've done that kind of thing too, and when I did, I knew. Peter did too.*

2 *"They know not what they do."*

3 *Judas knew what he was doing when he betrayed his Lord for cash.*

2 *"What will you give me, if I hand him over to you?"*

1 The deed had been well plotted, well thought out, even to the kiss in Gethsemane, a kind of "cover-up" for what the real motive was.

3 *For the sake of money and its momentary rewards, I've done some betraying of my Lord myself; and when I did, I knew what I was doing. Judas did too.*

2 *"They know not what they do."*

3 *Even the criminals crucified with Christ that day knew what they were doing:*

2 *“We are receiving the due reward of our deeds,” one of them reminded the other. At this point, at least that one seemed to feel, there was no further need to cover over what was going on by blame and bluster (as the other one, and the crowds below, were trying to do).*

3 ***I’ve suffered too the consequences of my own misdeeds, and when I did, I knew. The criminals did too.***

1 What all of them were doing, you may have noticed,

3 ***and what I find that I myself am guilty of,***

1 is not so much the deed itself—

3 ***I usually know what I am doing when I do it,***

1 as trying to justify it when it’s done, seeking a way all by oneself to make what is inherently WRONG somehow seem right, or not as bad as it really is. From Watergate and other more recent political scandals, we learned the word and saw the concept blown to headline-hogging size: the idea of COVER-UP, as current as today’s headlines, as old as Adam and Eve, whom the Lord God sought out in the garden of their sin and asked,

2 *“What have you DONE?”*

1 They sought to cover up their deed as well, didn’t they? Fig leaves, that time, and excuses. They knew what they had done.

3 ***And so do I. Yet, I know one thing that even they didn’t know.***

1 Even while they were covering up—making their lives tolerable, safe, bearable,

3 ***as I have done myself,***

1 they were driving the loving, living God away from themselves.

3 ***When possible, they hid from him.***

2 *“I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid.”*

3 ***Or denied him.***

2 *“I do not know the man.”*

3 ***When pressed, they drove him away.***

2 *“What evil has this man done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of*

death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.”

3 *When necessary they hung him up to die.*

2 *“It is necessary that one man should die for the people, than that the whole nation should perish.”*

3 *And, like them—all of them from Adam and Eve to Herod and Pilate—I hide from and drive away and crucify the King of Love whenever I cover up my guilt.*

1 So what are we doing here? Because we are so much in the habit—a habit, it seems, we have inherited from others but practiced to perfection by ourselves—of seeking to cover up whenever we know what it is that we have done, perhaps today we need to see THAT as the problem: not that we do not know what we have done, but that we try to wiggle out from under it, or cover up with fig-leaf garments or their modern equivalents.

(Pause)

2 *“Father, forgive them.”*

1 And Jesus knew what he was doing. He was dying there for the forgiveness not only of the things we know and confess quite readily—

3 *for they are often obvious—*

1 but also for the attitude that seeks to have less to confess, that seeks to justify ourselves by covering up, making excuses.

2 *Already in the First Word from the Cross our Savior lays us bare and causes us to stand naked before the judgment seat of God.*

1 For, as in the Garden of Eden long ago, so today the Lord God sees through those things with which we seek to justify, to cover up ourselves, and says that even that attempt at covering—

3 *ESPECIALLY that attempt at covering—*

1 requires forgiving too.

2 *“They divided his garments among them—”*

1 even as he prays above for their forgiveness and for ours. Is it stretching the picture too far to observe that in the Hebrew language of God’s original covenant, one of the words for “garment”—for something to COVER what ought not to be

seen—is the word that also means ATONEMENT—as in the name of the great Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, “day of covering”?

2 “*They divided HIS garments—*”

1 perhaps a coincidental detail, but nonetheless a picture of what we gather here today, in this great Season of the Atonement, to celebrate, and to do: to divide among ourselves (not as a gamble, but in the certainty of Spirit-given faith) the covering—THE covering for all our sins—the seamless robe of perfect righteousness for which Christ died that it might be given to us, that full forgiveness for which he prayed even as he gave his life to make it so.

2 “*They know not what they do,*”

1 May that not be true among us as Lent begins again, for we KNOW.

3 ***We know that what we have come to DO is be forgiven, as he prayed, not to seek to cover up what we have done as if we did not know, but to BE covered with the garment of his dying love.***

2 “*Father, forgive them.*”

1 So be it! Amen!

- This **Hymn**, entitled *Jesus, in Your Dying Woes*, is sung by the congregation to the melody *Septem Verba 777 6*:

Jesus, in your dying woes,
Even as your life-blood flows,
Craving pardon for our foes:
Hear us, holy Jesus.

Savior, for our pardon sue
When our sins your pangs renew,
For we know not what we do:
Hear us, holy Jesus.

Oh, may we, who mercy need,
Be like you in heart and deed,
When with wrongs our spirits bleed:
Hear us, holy Jesus.

- The **Offering** is gathered, during which time special music or a hymn of your choosing may be offered.

- These **Prayers** are offered:

P Since we have a High Priest who has gone before us, by whom we have access to the throne of grace, drawing near with full confidence let us join in fervent prayer:

C **Forgive us, Father, and show us what to do.**

P That the Church of Jesus Christ may be a place where the Gospel is both spoken and enacted, proclaimed in word and deed, let us join in fervent prayer:

C **Forgive us, Father, and show us what to do.**

P That the citizens of our nations, and our leaders, may acknowledge wrong where it exists and may work diligently to remove its causes and correct the problems it has wrought, let us join in fervent prayer:

C **Forgive us, Father, and show us what to do.**

P That God's redeeming health may be made manifest, especially among those who have been abused or neglected, harmed or hindered, stricken or saddened, forbidden or forsaken, let us join in fervent prayer:

C **Forgive us, Father, and show us what to do.**

P And that we who must return to dust may not despair in our mortality, but may be given grace in Jesus Christ to rise again to everlasting life, let us join in fervent prayer:

C **Forgive us, Father, and show us what to do.**

P Amen.

- The **Lord's Prayer** is offered. Or, if **Holy Communion** is celebrated, it may take place here according to local custom.

- This **Benediction** is offered by the pastor:
- Ⓟ The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you his peace. Your Father has, indeed, forgiven you. Amen.
- This final verse of the **Theme Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the melody *Southwell SM*:

Our Savior speaks; may we
Give heed to ev'ry word,
And grace be given faithfully
To trust what we have heard.