

Session 4. Promise of Ashes: The Fourth Set of Sacred Words of Jesus on the Cross



THE FOURTH SET OF SACRED WORDS (for March 17 Zoom Discussion)

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34

Only the Gospels of Mark and Matthew include this heart-rending cry of Jesus. Jesus cries out in utter despair to God. With that cry, Jesus of Nazareth fulfills the Messianic prophecy of the Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 53:12, Mark 15:28, Luke 24:46). They include no other Jesus Crucifixion words.

Mark concludes his Gospel with the horror of Jesus' final cry: "At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah,' And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last" (15:37). Matthew's words are similar to Mark's but use this Aramaic: "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Why do the onlookers think, Jesus is calling on Elijah to save him?

- Matthew knew Jews would know Aramaic & Hebrew; Mark knew the Gentiles would be familiar with Aramaic but probably not Hebrew. The translations don't affect the meaning of the text, but if Matthew is a more direct quote, it explains why the bystanders think Jesus is calling on Elijah to save him. Jewish tradition says that Elijah is present at the Passover meal. Legend says Elijah will come to rescue the righteous.
- However, in the prophetic sense, Elijah has already come as John the Baptist. Before John was born, when an angel came to tell the priest Zechariah that his wife would have a son, the angel paraphrased Malachi 4:6: John "will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:17).
- After the transfiguration (Matthew 17), Jesus tells Peter, James, & John that Elijah had come and was killed. The disciples recognize Jesus is talking about John the Baptist. John the Baptist was not really Elijah, but his mission was similar and he fulfilled the Prophecy.

Jesus' fourth Crucifixion cry mirrors the more ancient Hebrew Psalm 22:1-2. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer..." This psalm attributed to David recalls the cry of Israel, and of all innocent persons who suffer. Psalm 22 (16-18) also offers the striking prophecy of the Messiah's crucifixion: "My hands and feet have shriveled; I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me; they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

None of the other final Crucifixion words of Jesus have this anguished tone of despair, loss, and abandonment. This cry is from the painful heart of the human Jesus who feels deserted by his Father, the Holy Spirit, and his earthly companions, the disciples, who "all left him and fled" (Matthew 26:56, Mark 14:50). As if to emphasize his loneliness, Mark (15:40) even has his loved ones "looking on from afar." Jesus is all alone; he must

Face death alone. This is a dreadful moment. Jesus, who came to save us, is to be crucified. Tired, bleeding, suffering grievously, and alone, he faces horror of what he now enduring. When in Luke's gospel, Jesus is betrayed by Judas and seized by the centurions, Jesus fully acknowledges the power of darkness that lives in the temple priests and elders. Pronounces Jesus: *When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness* (Luke 22:53)! At this moment, Evil triumphs. Jesus suffers overwhelmed and alone as he accepts all the sins of humanity. It is in defeat of his humanity that the Divine plan of His Father will be completed. It is by Jesus' death that we are redeemed.

- **First Peter 2:24:** *"He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."*

Sources: jesuschristsavior.net/Words.html; bibleref.com/Mark/15/Mark-15-35.html; studylight.org/commentary/matthew/27-47.htm; blueletterbible.org/fag/don_stewart/don-stewart-809.cfml; com/Mark/15/Mark-15-35.html.



POET: MARY OLIVER (1935-2019)

Brief Biography. Born in a suburb of Cleveland, Oliver experienced a tragic early life having been consistently abused by her father, a high school teacher and athletic coach. She left home immediately after graduating from high school and never returned. She only revealed her father's abuse in a 2011 interview with Maria Shriver. She finally wrote two poems (one angry and one accepting) for her father, who had already died.

Not long after leaving high school, she met her life partner Molly Malone Cook (10 years older than Mary and a well-known photographer). They eventually moved to Provincetown MA where Molly owned a photography studio. In the late 1990's. Mary, who had steered clear of religion, became a close friend of Tom Shaw, Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts. Bishop Shaw greatly admired the devotion and sacredness of Mary's poetry; they became close friends. Although Mary had avoided the church, her time with Bishop Shaw changed her life. Shaw baptized her and welcomed her into the Episcopal Church. For many years, she was an active member of the altar guild at St. Mary of the Harbor Episcopal Church in Provincetown, MA. When her life partner Molly died, Mary, who also battled cancer, moved first to Key West and then to Hobe Sound on the Florida East Coast.

Mary was remarkably shy, but also clever and funny. She adored dogs and published a set of "Dog Songs." She is a much admired and beloved poet. Even though she never received a college degree, she taught at several colleges. She received honorary doctorates from the Art Institute of Boston, Dartmouth College, and Tufts University. She also received two Pulitzer Prizes for her poetry. Below is a link to a delightful discussion of Oliver's life, complete with pictures. brainpickings.org/2015/01/20/mary-oliver-molly-malone-cook-our-world/

Mary Oliver, WILD GEESE. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IiyIWR2orE>

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your only
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

March 11, 2021--St. Richard's Episcopal Church, Winter Park--Dr. Pam Menke Facilitator 2

Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across landscapes,
over the parries and the deep trees,
the mountains and the deep rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting,
over and over again announcing your place
in the family of things.

Mary Oliver, *The Fish* (2010).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnKUKmcFVuo> Don't miss Mary reading this remarkable and daring poem. Her reading begins immediately; the poem lasts 1:01 min.

Comment. On catching her first fish, Oliver recalls the miracle of the fish and the sea. This is a daring Oliver poem, written after joining the Episcopal Church. Here is a famous quotation from the Dialogues of St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380): ***The soul is in God and God in the soul, just as the fish is in the sea and the sea in the fish.*** Think of this poem as an emblem of the Eucharist and the pain Christ shared with us. Why are we "nourished by the mystery"?

Mary Oliver, *The Fish* (2010)

The first fish I ever caught would not lie down
quiet in the pail but flailed and sucked
at the burning amazement of the air
and died in the slow pouring off of rainbows.

Later

I opened his body and separated the flesh from the bones
and ate him.

Now the sea is in me: I am the fish, the fish glitters in me;
we are risen, tangled together; certain; to fall back to the sea.

Out of pain, and pain, and more pain, we feed this feverish plot.
We are nourished by the mystery.

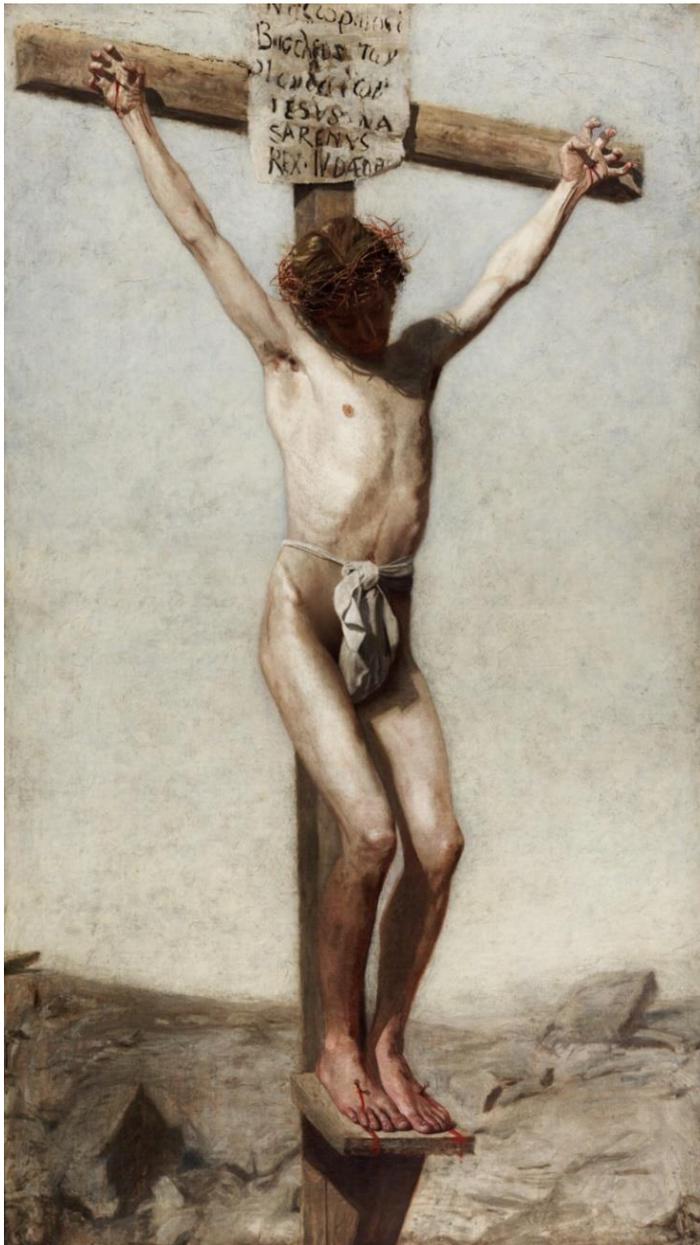
Artist: Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), *The Solitary Christ* (1882)

The Painting is on the next page.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? This 1882 painting reflects the poignant, heart-breaking cry of Jesus. Raised a protestant, Eakins was particularly critical of Catholic clergy. He felt that church hierarchy should not mediate between God and the faithful; for him, belief lay in the heart and not in ritual. This is the only Biblical subject that he ever attempted. Using a young male student as his model posing on a large wooden cross, Eakins consciously chose a seemingly barren, rock-filled setting. He then crafted a realist interpretation of one of the central devotional subjects in Christian art.

March 11, 2021--St. Richard's Episcopal Church, Winter Park--Dr. Pam Menke Facilitator 3

Although large in scale, the work was not done on commission. Eakins challenged the traditional



Iconography of the crucifixion by challenging the signs of divine presence. The painting was viewed as scandalous.

Using a young male student as his model, he posed him on a large wooden cross, Eakins consciously chose a seemingly barren, rock-filled setting. He then crafted a realist interpretation of one of the central devotional subjects in Christian art. Although large in scale, the work was not done on commission.

Protestant critics wrote scathing reviews of the painting, negatively identifying the subject with Catholicism since the cross actually bore the corpus or body and, thus, was closer to a crucifix than a cross. Catholic critics insisted that Eakins' human Jesus lacked divinity. Most critics found Eakins's graphic representation of Christ's body "revolting."

Eakins broke the mold & crafted a distinctly modern crucifixion that challenged contemporary religious beliefs. This crucifixion disquieted viewers with its emphasis on Christ's material presence. Eakins sent it again and again to major international exhibitions. He

actively approached museums, hoping that they might take the painting. In the end, he found no takers. His wife later included *The Crucifixion* in a gift of her husband's paintings to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Eakins's modern crucifixion challenged both religious belief and artistic conventions, helping to define it for the artist as his "best work."

Sources: [/mavcor.yale.edu/conversations/object-narratives/thomas-eakins-crucifixion](http://mavcor.yale.edu/conversations/object-narratives/thomas-eakins-crucifixion); [.thomaseakins.org/biography.html](http://thomaseakins.org/biography.html); nga.gov/collection/artist-info.1260.html metmuseum.org/toah/hd/eapa/hd_eapa.html.