



The Final Words

Written by: WELS Women's Ministry

Lent by Candlelight is an opportunity for women to meditate on the passion of Christ and his sacrifice for sin. This program will meditate on the last words of Christ.

Theme:

For thousands of years, Christians have set aside the 40 days before Easter to reflect on the passion and death of Jesus. We meditate on his selfless sacrifice, given to pay for the sins of all people. This service gives believers an opportunity to reflect on the last words of Christ, spoken as he suffered on the cross. As we reflect on the last seven words of Jesus, we deepen our understanding of his sacrificial love for sinners and meditate on the rich truths that are revealed in his final words.

Scripture based on:

The last seven words of Christ from the cross.

Program notes:

- Logistical notes
 - Words in **blue font** give logistical information for candlelighters or musicians.
 - Prior to the service, a single white candle should be lit and placed in a prominent place (this is the Christ Candle, which is never extinguished).
 - There should be seven *unlit* candles lined up in one row on a table with a black linen/tablecloth. The reader(s) should be seated behind the unlit candles. The candles will be lit during the opening hymn.
- Suggested hymns are listed along with specified verses. You can substitute these for other musical selections. ***Just be sure to note any licensing information that may be necessary for your selections.*** If you make any changes from the suggested service plan, you may have to edit or adjust the templated service folder.
- PowerPoint Slides (PPT) are available to compliment the program. PPT slide numbers are listed throughout the program. *Note: If you edit and adjust the PPT file and slides, you may need to adjust your numbering in the program to match.*

Approximate Length	Suggested Ensemble	Program Inclusions
60 min.	1 Leader 7 Readers & Candlelighter(s) Musicians 1 person to run/advance PPT if using additional media options	Publicity Checklist Fonts + Licensing Information Program Guide Service Folder Social Media Graphics PowerPoint



The Final Words

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PPT Slide 1

PPT Slide 2

WELCOME

Leader: For thousands of years, Christians have set aside the 40 days before Easter to reflect on the passion and death of Jesus. We meditate on his selfless sacrifice, given to pay for the sins of all people. This service gives believers an opportunity to reflect on the last words of Christ, spoken as he suffered on the cross. As Christ's last words are read, seven candles are gradually extinguished. Tonight [today], we reflect on the last seven words of Jesus to deepen our understanding of his sacrificial love for sinners and meditate on the rich truths that are revealed in his final words.

PPT Slide 3

HYMN & LIGHTING OF THE SEVEN CANDLES

420 – Jesus, I Will Ponder Now
(Suggested verses: 1-2, 5-6)

As the hymn is introduced, seven candlelighters walk up to stand behind the unlit candles—one person behind each candle. As the hymn is sung, they should light their candle per instructions with hymn verses below.

Optional lighting of candles: *The first person could carry their unlit candle to the Christ Candle and light their candle from the Christ Candle flame. They would return their candle to the row of seven candles. Each subsequent candle could be lit from the burning candle next to them.*

Candlelighter 1: *(The 1st candle is lit as the following words are sung.)*

Jesus, I will ponder now on your holy passion;
with your Spirit me endow for such meditation.

Candlelighter 2: *(The 2nd candle is lit as these words are sung—continue the pattern.)*

Grant that I in love and faith may the image cherish
of your suffering, pain, and death that I may not perish.

PPT Slide 4

Candlelighter 3: *(3rd candle is lit)*

Make me see your great distress, anguish, and affliction,
bonds and stripes and wretchedness and your crucifixion;

Candlelighter 4: *(4th candle is lit)*

make me see how scourge and rod, spear and nails did wound you,
how for them you died, O God, who with thorns had crowned you.

PPT Slide 5

Candlelighter 5: *(5th candle is lit)*

If my sins give me alarm and my conscience grieve me,
let your cross my fear disarm, peace of conscience give me.

Candlelighter 6: *(6th candle is lit)*

Help me see forgiveness won by your holy passion.
If for me he slays his Son, God must have compassion!

PPT Slide 6

Candlelighter 7: *(7th candle is lit)*

Graciously my faith renew; help me bear my crosses,
learning humbleness from you, peace mid pain and losses.

(The candlelighters should all be standing reverently behind their candles, joining in the following phrase.)

May I give you love for love! Hear me, O my Savior,
that I may in heav'n above sing your praise forever.

PPT Slide 7

Leader: Let us pray.

PRAYER

(Piano/instrument continues to play the hymn quietly. Candlelighters are seated following the prayer)

Leader: Lord Jesus, we gather to honor your sacrifice and remember the price you paid to redeem us from our sins. Deepen our love for you and draw us to see your suffering with humble and penitent hearts. Strengthen our faith as we reflect on your final words and send your Spirit to deepen our understanding of your truth. In these words, we see your commitment as our Savior and your love for all people. We see your humanity as you die on the cross in our place. We see your divinity as God who is

able to redeem all sinners. May your words be praised for they are holy, and we give them the greatest honor. Amen.

PPT Slide 8

The First Word

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

Reader 1: Beaten, tortured, and nailed to a cross, our Savior prayed for his enemies. These are the first words recorded by Christ as he was crucified. The Roman soldiers who pounded the nails in his hands were merciless and cruel. They were accustomed to the act of crucifixion—and familiar with the tools that drove nails into Jesus' hands. We gasp at the scene and shudder at the thought.

But even more, we are amazed at our Savior who not only held back divine retribution but prayed for those who tortured him. Christ prayed that God would forgive the men who tore his flesh and mocked his innocence. Christ prayed that God would extend his mercy and forgiveness to those who did not know him. Christ loved all those who were blind to God's grace and deaf to his love. And so he prays. God is also teaching *us* here. In these first moments of Christ's crucifixion, we see beautiful truths about God's plan of salvation in Christ that we can never forget. Our merciful God is forgiving—and we are desperate sinners in need of a Savior who forgives.

God's mercy is not a mere choice or occasional action. It is his essence. God offers mercy because he is merciful. It is not our repentance that moves him to forgive us. God does not spring into action because of our sorrow over sin. Scripture tells us that *"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* We see this truth on full display in these first words of Christ. While he is dying for those who hate him, he prays, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

And in these first words of Christ, we can also be reminded of *our* need for a Savior. Instead of seeing the sins of Roman soldiers crucifying an innocent man, we are pierced by our own sin. It is our sin that nailed Christ to the cross. Our sins require a sacrifice—they demand a blood payment that we are unable to pay. Without Christ, we would stand condemned before God, as guilty as the Roman soldiers who nailed Jesus to the cross and watched him suffer.

God wants you to see your sin—and he wants you to see his perfect mercy. This message of Scripture is visible on the cross. You *see* it as Jesus, the Word made flesh, suffered to pay for your sins. You *hear* it as our tortured Savior prays for his enemies. This is our God.

One candle is extinguished as these words are spoken:

Reader 1: Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

PPT Slide 9

PRAYER

Reader 1: Lord Jesus, our merciful Savior, we marvel at your great love and desire to save all people. Thank you for being the holy, faithful God who extends his mercy to all generations. We praise you for the sacrifice you made to pay for sin. We pray for those who have not yet learned of your forgiveness. Let your grace flow through us to reflect the depth of your love and forgiveness in Christ. Give us opportunities to share the joy of your salvation and the truth of your Word. In Christ's holy name we pray, Amen.

PPT Slides 10-11

HYMN

570 – God Loved the World So That He Gave
(Suggested verses: 1-3)

PPT Slide 12

The Second Word

Today you will be with me in paradise.

Reader 2: Our compassionate Savior speaks to us again from the cross and God strengthens our hope for heaven. These familiar and treasured words were spoken to one of the criminals crucified with Christ.

Two criminals were crucified with Jesus, and one of them mocked our Savior. The other criminal humbly defended Jesus' innocence and said, *"We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong"* (Luke 23:41). In response, Christ offered these words of comfort, *"Today you will be with me in paradise."*

As we hear Christ's response in this second word from the cross, we reflect on the tremendous power in one word here . . . *"Today."*

With this one word, Jesus made it clear that the guilty criminal would not need to prove his faith with good works or even acts of repentance. There would be no demands made of this man who saw his sin and trusted in Jesus. There would be no test to question his faith or stern rebukes that pointed to his epic failures. Jesus simply said, *"Today."* Jesus announced that this man would soon enter the gates of paradise—gates that he himself opened for this man.

As Christ opens the door to this man, we hear his certain promise of salvation for us as well. There are no demands or requirements that shall be made of us, no guilt-driven penance required. Christ assures us—and will assure us again with words from the cross—that he has done it all.

We are equipped to silence the condemning whispers of doubt that can plague us. Jesus assures us, nothing is required of us. Our sin and failures only remind us of our need for a Savior. We listen to his words and remember his promise of paradise—given because of his saving work. Quiet confidence calms our hearts when we wonder if our faith is strong enough. Here, through these words, Christ tells us we don't need to add anything to his completed work of salvation. It is his gift to give—and he freely gives it to us.

One candle is extinguished as these words are spoken:

Reader 2: Today you will be with me in paradise.

PPT Slide 13

PRAYER

Reader 2: Oh, Savior Jesus, your words continue to reveal your great mercy and love for sinners. Your words bring hope and healing to our troubled souls when we have doubts. Speak these words to us again and again when we see our sin and remember we are not worthy. Let your truth reign in our hearts and minds—paradise has been opened because of your perfect life and innocent death. You are the Savior who paid the full price for sin and you make no demands of your people. You extend your great mercy and bring us into the gates of heaven for your glory. Amen.

PPT Slides 14-16

HYMN

899 – Jerusalem the Golden
(Suggested verses: 1-3)

PPT Slide 17

The Third Word

Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother.

Reader 3: Christ's third word from the cross continues to show his compassion and mercy—even as he dies. Mary, the virgin mother of Christ stood at the foot of the cross and watched her son suffer an agonizing death. The words of Simeon, spoken to her days after Jesus' birth, were likely echoing in her mind, *"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."* (Luke 2:34,35).

God shows us Mary's pain and gives us a glimpse of her heartache. Chosen from eternity to be the virgin mother, Mary had been told a sword would pierce her soul. She too, would feel pain—but she had no idea what it would be. Mary had pondered rich, joyful treasures in her heart—the promised Messiah had been miraculously conceived in her womb! But Mary must have also wondered about God's plan of

salvation. How would it be accomplished? What would the Son of God need to do? And what did Simeon mean that her soul would also be pierced?

Mary's soul was pierced as she stood at the bloodied feet of Christ and watched him suffer. What unimaginable heartache she must have felt. Jesus saw his mother's pain and loved her with the deepest compassion. He understood her needs. The third word of Christ extends a third merciful, loving intercession, "*Woman, here is your son.*"

Mary, who was standing next to John, heard these tender words as Jesus gently entrusted her to the care of his disciple. Jesus encouraged Mary to embrace John as her son and allow him to care for her. This gracious provision ensured that Mary would receive the care she needed.

Then Jesus looked at John and said, "*Here is your mother.*" Jesus yoked John with the light burden of loving and caring for Mary. He charged John with the duties of a firstborn son, knowing John would consider his responsibilities to Mary a privilege and loving act of faith.

While suffering and dying, Jesus still looked to the needs of others. His selfless love reminds us that our Savior was sinless and never failed to lovingly serve others. He wasn't just thoughtful; his compassion and holy living were perfect. This third word from the cross assures us that even as Christ suffered for sin, he never stopped living a perfect life of obedience on our behalf.

One candle is extinguished as these words are spoken:

Reader 3: Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother.

PPT Slide 18

PRAYER

Reader 3: Lord Jesus, we are in awe of your tender mercy and compassion. Even here on the cross, we are humbled by your perfect and selfless love. We see your love for Mary and praise God for choosing her to be your mother. May the examples of committed love, shown in this moment, move us to love and care for one another. Strengthen us to live as a family with love that is willing to serve others. Remind us of the privilege we have to look to the needs of others as a reflection of your love. Amen.

PPT Slides 19-21

HYMN

729 – Son of God, Eternal Savior
(Suggested verses: 1-3)

PPT Slide 22

The Fourth Word

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

Reader 4: Three words have been spoken—and three more will come—but here is the pinnacle of Christ’s suffering: he is forsaken by God. With holy justice, the righteous wrath of God is poured out on our innocent Savior. The price of sin is paid in full with the holy, precious blood of Christ and his innocent suffering and death.

The debt was satisfied and we have been redeemed—the word literally means that we are bought back. On the cross, Christ paid to free us from our slavery to sin. He purchased us to be in an eternal relationship with God.

When we imagine the suffering of Christ and his gruesome crucifixion, we see a beaten, bloody man dying on a cross. We reverently recall the hours of torment he endured. We cringe at the thought of his raw, torn flesh pressed against the coarse wood or the searing pain in his hands and feet. We can barely fathom the stabbing pain in his heart and lungs as he struggled to breathe.

But what we *cannot* imagine is God forsaking his only Son. This was not a human act or feeling—it was divine wrath. The eternal God abandoned his only Son.

Jesus’ prayers are no longer addressed to his loving Father. Instead, Jesus calls out “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” And in his prayer, Jesus asks a question that we must be able to answer. Why is he forsaken by God? Why has he been tortured and abandoned?

Did Jesus ask why because he did not know? That’s part of the answer. So deep into his sufferings he was that he did not know the reasons for them. But that’s not all. Our risen Lord had these words recorded so that you would know he was forsaken. God wanted it recorded in his eternal Word that the Son of God was forsaken and punished for the sins of the world.

Why must we know the answer to this question? Why is it recorded so clearly? Because the guilt of our sin assails us and Satan loves to remind us of what we deserve. Our hope of heaven can seem uncertain when we see our own unworthiness. We can stumble in fear of punishment when we dwell on our sins without remembering Christ’s payment for sin. But Christ speaks to us from the cross. We see it and hear it. He was forsaken by God as he bore the punishment for our sin. His words are heard for eternity. He suffered for us.

One candle is extinguished as these words are spoken:

Reader 4: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

PRAYER

Reader 4: Lord Jesus, you paid for my sin by your death on the cross with your innocent suffering and death. Your cry to God when he had forsaken you pierces my heart. I know it was my sin that caused him to forsake you. It was my sin that made you cry out in agony. Thank you for bearing the wrath of God in my place. I'm sorry for my sins—and so grateful that you took the punishment that justified me before God. I'm humbled by your sacrifice. Help me remember that you were forsaken so I could be forgiven. You took the punishment that brought me peace. In your holy name we pray, Amen.

PPT Slides 24-26

HYMN

430 – Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted
(Suggested verses: 1-3)

PPT Slide 27

The Fifth Words

I am thirsty.

Reader 5: The account of Christ's passion and crucifixion proves that he was a man of flesh and blood. It is important that we know Jesus was a man so that he could suffer in our place. He had to be human to save humanity. Scripture shows us again and again that this is true. But these simple words from the cross provide final testimony. After hours of torture and crucifixion, his human body was failing, and Jesus' thirst was overwhelming. This assures us that he suffered in our place.

But his thirst and humanity are not the only thing we see. While this is certainly a display of Christ's human nature, it also assures us that he was the promised Messiah. Christ is the Messiah promised in the Garden of Eden. He is the long-awaited Savior the Jews sang about in the Psalms. The songs of prophecy were all fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus. Even the thirst of our dying Savior was prophesied a thousand years before he was born. God's people sang,

*"My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death." (Psalm 22:15)*

King David prophesied that vinegar would be put in the water that was offered to Jesus. *"They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst"* (Psalm 69:21).

The apostle John makes a specific note of this truth in his gospel. He writes, *Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28).* Jesus

fulfilled every prophecy that was written—and Scripture records the fulfillment of those prophecies to assure us God’s promises are true. Every detail of God’s plan of salvation is complete.

We stand at the foot of the cross and look at our Savior. There is so much we cannot fathom—his humanity, the prophecies, his divinity. So many things we barely understand. But we believe. By grace we trust that because of his humanity, Christ is a sacrifice that can stand in our place. With confidence, we see the many prophecies that were fulfilled. Through faith we embrace that because he is true God, his sacrifice covers the sins of all people.

One candle is extinguished as these words are spoken:

Reader 5: I am thirsty.

PPT Slide 28

PRAYER

Reader 5: Savior, you are the Son of God and Son of Man. With simple words you have given us such great thoughts to consider. Your suffering pierces our hearts but you have also reminded us that your crucifixion was God’s plan for salvation. God gave his people glimpses of your work for thousands of years, but here we see the prophecies and plans fulfilled. Thank you for the assurance you have given—everything was done. Amen.

PPT Slide 29

TIME FOR REFLECTION

Consider an instrumental piece here. Piano, handbells/hand chimes or other instruments could be used for a few moments of accompanied reflection.

***Optional hymn solo:** “What Grace Is This” (Christian Worship 395) It might be difficult for the group to sing this unfamiliar melody. **Please note:** This hymn from Christian Worship is COPYRIGHT and cannot be used without proper licensing.*

PPT Slide 30

The Sixth Word

It is finished.

Reader 6: The Savior’s work is done. Every prophecy has been fulfilled. Every commandment has been kept. Every word he spoke was truth. Every act of love was holy. Every moment of his life was sinless. Every sin has been paid for. There is nothing left undone and now the Savior speaks three words that we cling to, “*It is finished.*”

We need these three words because our human spirit is drawn to look only at our sin and linger in its ugliness. We feel our unworthiness and know that we fail. Satan wants us to believe that Christ's sacrifice wasn't enough: our sins are too great—there are too many! We wonder how God could forgive us again and again. How could he forgive the sins that would bring us such shame and humiliation? Despair can loom near our hearts and minds.

Other times, we try to make amends for our sin. We want to show our repentance and make things better. We want to right all the things we've done wrong; to offset our failures with good behavior. We may even want to tip the scales with self-righteousness. We want to feel good about ourselves and what we do.

In place of all these thoughts, Jesus' gives us the truth. He says, *"It is finished."* We have sinned greatly—and often—but the sacrifice has been made for every sin. Every sin has been paid for—Jesus tells us right here. Finished. Completed. Jesus also tells us that the payment has been made in full. He didn't give us a good start or leave a few things for us to do. We cannot add to work that has been finished. We cannot add any righteousness to the holy robe of Christ that covers us.

This truth brings us comfort. It calms and assures us. It redirects our desires and motivates us with grace. What power is held in these few words from our Savior!

His finished work will last into eternity and bring him everlasting glory. The praises of believers will be united in one voice to honor the one who completed our salvation. Holy is the Lord, the one who has finished the work of redeeming his people and paid the full price for their sin.

One candle is extinguished as these words are spoken:

Reader 6: It is finished.

PPT Slide 31

PRAYER

Reader 6: Holy Savior, you took the punishment for our sin. We humbly repent for the sins that drove you to the cross—the price you had to pay to buy us back from sin, death, and the devil. We hear these words with great somberness and honor their heavy weight. But Lord Jesus, we also cling to these words with hope and joy because we are assured that the work is done and the plan of salvation has been completed. We praise you with quiet reverence but also with joy because we have been given forgiveness and eternal life by your great mercy. Amen.

PPT Slides 32-34

HYMN

425 – Go To Dark Gethsemane
(Suggested verses: 1-3)

PPT Slide 35

The Seventh Word

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Reader 7: Jesus yielded his life to finish God's plan of salvation. He was willing to become a man and live a perfect life on our behalf. Now he yields his body to death.

It is amazing to think about all the times that Jesus' life was threatened. When he was a baby, King Herod gave orders to kill all the boys in the vicinity of Bethlehem who were age two or younger. But the Lord guided Jesus' parents to take him to Egypt so he would be safe.

When Jesus began his earthly ministry, he returned to his childhood synagogue in Galilee. He read from the scroll of Isaiah but was met with outrage. Luke records that they took him to the brow of a hill to throw him off the cliff. *"But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way"* (Luke 4:30). The apostle John records that the Jewish leaders tried to kill Jesus because he healed a man on the Sabbath and because Jesus claimed to be equal to God. In another account, Jews picked up rocks to stone Jesus when he said, *"Before Abraham was born, I am"* (John 8:58). Their hatred grew, and finally the religious leaders created a scheme to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. *"But not during the festival"* because they feared *"the people may riot"* (Mark 14:2).

Though Jesus' life had been threatened from the time he was born, no scheme of man could take his life. His time had not yet come. It wasn't until this moment on the cross—when everything had been completed—that Jesus would give up his life. It was his decision. Only he had the authority to lay down his life.

Even in his crucifixion, Jesus chose when to die. The act of crucifixion was sometimes hastened by breaking the legs of one who hung on a cross. Without the ability to push up on their feet and get a breath, a person on a cross would suffocate. The Roman soldiers planned to break the legs of Jesus, but he had already died. The ancient prophecy lingers in our mind, *"he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken"* (Psalm 34:20).

The gospel of John reminds us, *"These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken'"* (John 19:36). He gave up his life at the precise moment that he planned. He had fulfilled every prophecy and paid for every sin. His work was done, and he was ready to go home to his Father.

One candle is extinguished as these words are spoken:

Reader 7: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

PRAYER

Reader 7: Heavenly Father, what joy it must have brought you to see the work of salvation completed and all prophecy fulfilled. You knew that your plan was carried out, your people were saved from sin, and your Son would be coming home to reign with you for eternity. What a wonderful blessing! This was a moment you knew would happen—it was as good as done when you made the promise. But here, it is spoken for our benefit. With gentleness, our Savior commends his spirit to you. Strengthen us to live for his glory, sharing with others the beautiful message of what Christ has done for us. Amen.

PPT Slide 37

CLOSE OF SERVICE

Women may leave in silence as they are ready.

PPT Slides 38-39