**Last Words, First Fruits**

By Rev. Sheryl Stewart

2 Sam. 23: 1-7 Rev. 1: 4(b)-8 John 18: 33- 37

Psalm 93

 The last words someone speaks, especially if they are a notable or notorious person, is a theme which has captured the imaginations of many writers. Such last statements can be profound, funny, inspiring, or mundane. In the mundane list falls P.T. Barnum, whose last words, in 1891, were; “How were the receipts today in Madison Square Garden?”

 Then, we have inspiring, like John Quincy Adams on 2- 21-1848: “See in what peace a Christian can die.” Or, “I am ready to die for my Lord, that in my blood the Church may find liberty and peace (Thomas a Becket 1170).” Or, “It is very beautiful over there (Thomas Edison, 10-18-31).”

 Then, we have humorous, like Humphrey Bogart on 1-14-57: “I should have never switched Scotch to Martinis.” In a similar vein, Dylan Thomas remarked, “I’ve had 18 straight whiskeys, I think that’s the record.”

 Many people use their last energy to make things easier on those who love them. Pastor Jim tells this great story of the mother of one of his fellow volunteers at Crossroads. This woman and her family had practiced the old tradition of opening a window in the house when someone dies at home so that the spirit can fly free and rise to God. At the end of a long illness, this woman turned to her daughter and said, “It’s time to open the window.” Not only is that a gentle way to tell someone that it is your time, but it gives them something to do that will bring comfort to her and her loved one in the doing.

 My own Dad, though he could not speak last words, did a beautiful thing. I was there in his hospital room when he gasped and stopped breathing. Knowing that hearing is one of the last senses to shut down, I said a quick prayer and told him I’d get Mom, who was in the cafeteria. Mom walked slowly due to an injury to both ankles years ago; so, I settled the bill while she started back to Dad. Even with that delay and her head start, I reentered the room right behind Mom. As I did, and as she took his hand, the monitor immediately went from 33 beats a minute (a CPR rate which just sustains life) to a flat line. He’d waited to say goodbye to her.

 Of course, death can also be an occasion for confusion or denial. Lady Astor woke during her last illness to see all her family gathered and asked, “Am I dying or is this my birthday?” John Barrymore’s last words, on 5-23-42, were: “Die? I should say not, dear fellow. No Barrymore would allow such a conventional thing to happen to him.” If I have time to speak at my end, I’d hope to speak words that would be a gift and comfort for others. More likely, my last words will be, “Oops!”

 Not so with King David, who had time to compose his thoughts as well as he did his psalms. He chose to echo God’s promises. He knew his house would not always be just, but God would both provide increase and ensure that any thorns would grow in vain. Of course, this prayer was answered in Jesus, the first fruit of Heaven, whose seven last words save us all.

 David was sure any thorns springing from his line would be burned away in God’s wrathful judgment, but Jesus – far from damning sinners – wore the thorns as His crown. The blood of Christ blood was not only shed by sinners, but for them. Jesus destroys evil by shedding His blood, which touches us every Communion Sunday. Jesus did not burn thorns, He converted them.

 Revelation says that ***every*** eye will be on Jesus at His return, even those who pierced Him. As Jesus died for sinners as well as by them, this verse is a compelling witness to universal salvation. So, we see first fruits, last words, and one Savior.

Thus, God has both the first and the last word: “Let there be light!” The light of hope, the light of life, the light of love: all are one in the Trinity. So, when you go forth from worship on this week after Thanksgiving, anticipating the First Sunday of Advent, shine for Jesus. Just remember, God has the last word and, as our brother Lynn always says, “Keep the light on!”