

St. Andrew Evangelical Lutheran Church

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"It is Finished" John 19:28-30

Friday April 10, 2020 – Good Friday

28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

We've all seen it—the last strikeout of the World Series and the mad rush from the dugout that follows; the final seconds ticked away in the Super Bowl or the March Madness tournament and the ticker-tape cloudburst. . . . Finished! The training, the practice, the hopes, the dreams, the efforts of a long season—finished!

"But," you are saying, "you can't compare that to the scene here, set on the hill of the skull under skies of divine darkness." Of course, you're right. Here, on a hill outside Jerusalem, is a scene more like when the Allies broke into concentration camps at the end of World War II and the skeleton like survivors could scarcely believe it was over. This is more like earthquake victims or survivors of a mine collapse—traumatized, having been in the dark for days but now brought to the surface—in shock, blinded by the light, breaking down in tears upon their rescue. They had been pushed to the limits of human endurance—and now it's finished.

Yet even those situations pale in comparison to what happened on Good Friday. Who can even begin to understand the torments of soul, the very pains of hell that the Son of God endured on the cross? Who can even begin to comprehend what he went through as he was despised and rejected by man and forsaken by God his Father—to say nothing of the physical torment of crucifixion? Moreover, Jesus wasn't alive by the end of Good Friday, shedding tears of a survivor's relief in the embrace of family and friends. No. When all was finished, **"He bowed his head and gave up his spirit."** On the cross the Son of Man and the Son of God died; the soldiers pierced his side to prove it was so.

But just before he died, Jesus spoke three words of truth, perhaps the three most important words he ever spoke: **"It is finished."** We don't know if he shouted them out in a loud voice or forced them out between breaths; John was nearby and heard them—the only one of the gospel writers who recorded these three words. Yet whether spoken loudly or softly between gasps, these three words echoed throughout heaven and earth—and hell!—and continue to echo in this sin-wrecked world, giving eternal hope and comfort to all who hear and believe: **"It is finished"!**

The sign that Pilate had posted above the cross said, **"Jesus of Nazareth. . . ."** And he was; Jesus grew up there, the son of Mary and Joseph (so everyone naturally assumed). "Isn't this the carpenter's son?" the people asked years later. Yet something in their gut told them that this wasn't a typical man from Nazareth.

They were right, of course. The son of Joseph was also the Son of God with a greater Father. Even at the age of 12 Jesus was aware of who his true Father was and that this Father had sent him to earth to do his business. When the time came for Jesus' ministry, the Father in heaven publicly recognized the vital work of living a holy life, which Jesus had been faithfully doing up to that point: **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"** (Mt 3:17).

But following Jesus' baptism, the list of things his Father wanted accomplished became more detailed. So Jesus went out of the water of Baptism into the desert to face his foe. Then he began preaching, sharing words "not his own" but the very words his Father had given him to say. The same was true of the miracles, which were planned out by the Father to bring glory to his name. Jesus wasn't living as he pleased or just "doin' his thing"; he was on a mission.

Yet the greatest reason why Jesus was sent from heaven to earth was to make his Father known. John said that at the beginning of his gospel. By nature we have such a vague picture of who God is; we still can see this in the religions of today's world. Born in sin as we are, we also have a natural fear (terror!) of God. God looks like nothing more than a huge shadow, towering above us—dark, unnatural in shape, no details. And that's all we see because **"no one has ever seen God. . . ."**

". . . But the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (Jn 1:18). In the person of Jesus, God stepped out of the shadows. What do we see? A God who is also true man, our brother. We see a face of deep, deep love. We hear words of incredible comfort. We see a warrior who came to destroy the devil's work. We see a God who desires nothing more than that we have an eternal bond of love and fellowship like that which once existed between God and the crown of his creation, before Adam's tragic fall.

On the cross, we see Jesus revealing the Father's glory. We can only see it with eyes of faith—this deep love that sacrificed his own Son, this great power that will destroy sin and death, this heart beating for and bleeding for our salvation. ***"It is finished"***—all the Father's work that he gave Jesus to do so that a world of sinners might truly know him as he truly is—the God who saves.

And on the cross, we also see the power of God doing what we, simply put, are unable to do.

The human mind (especially the minds of self-determining Americans) can't wrap itself around this thought, true as it is. More than that, the human mind doesn't want to wrap itself around this thought. We know from Scripture that we are born ***"dead in . . . transgressions and sins"*** (Eph 2:1). We look around society and see evidence of man's sin all over the place. Yet the greatest display of our sin, the greatest resistance to the will of God, isn't confined to the dark alleys and the jails. Rather, it is found on your street; it is found in your workplace; it is found in rich homes in the suburbs and in poverty-stricken cities of the world. What is this great sin? It is to spit in God's face by looking at the cross, looking at the Father's incredible sacrifice, and saying, "No thanks, God; I'll pay my own way. No thanks, God; I'm basically a good person, and I'll make it on my own." It is stubborn human pride that believes that I can actually with my own sacrifices, with my own efforts and general good will, become deserving of God's praise and the reward of heaven. This is what Satan planted in the human heart when he led the world into sin: to make God accept me on my terms, not his. To the sinful mind this all makes sense; in every other aspect of life, good work and good deeds get praise and reward.

Yet Paul says this about the sinful mind: ***"The mind governed by the flesh is death"*** (Ro 8:6). And it is. Ironically, the sinful mind doesn't understand sin—how serious it is, what punishment it deserves from a holy God. There is no quicker path to eternal death, no quicker path that takes you further from the glory of the Father than choosing to stand on your own goodness.

Here, on the cross, we see God's way—the better way, the only way. We've said it so often in the Nicene Creed: "For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven." And there, on the cross, it was finished:

- ***"It is finished"***—the suffering Jesus endured for the sins of the world.
- ***"It is finished"***—the full payment, the complete punishment of your sins and mine.
- ***"It is finished"***—God does not—will not—punish you for your sins, since they have already been punished.
- ***"It is finished"***—since God himself did it all, it was done fully and perfectly.
- ***"It is finished"***—Satan cannot accuse you anymore.

- ***"It is finished"***—your sins need not burden your conscience.
- ***"It is finished"***—death no longer is a haunting fear.
- ***"It is finished"***—hell has no power over you who put your faith in Jesus the crucified.

And we know for certain it is finished because another gospel writer tells us that Jesus' last words from the cross began with the word "Father." God's face was once again turned to his Son. The punishment was over; the sacrifice, accepted. Father and Son were again at peace.

For you, dear friends in Christ, this also means that your punishment is over and that God is at peace with you. Through faith in his Son, you are clothed in Jesus' holiness; you are a dear son, a dear daughter, adopted into God's own family through Baptism. Does he not bless you each week as you leave his house, reminding you that he too turns his face toward you now and gives you peace?

And because of this cross and these three words of truth, on that day when each of us has finished our earthly journey, we can gently bow our heads too—as Jesus did on the cross, as if going to sleep—and commend our spirits into our Father's hands. Life isn't finished then—but just beginning. For this God of all power and love will take us, call us by name, and bring us into his eternal joy. Amen.