

**All Things Made New**

St. John 19:1-37

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In the passion narrative today, St. John describes the agony of Jesus as he was scourged by soldiers, marched out of the city bearing the burden of his own heavy cross, and then crucified. John tells us his last words as he was hanging there, parched, in the hot sun: “It is finished.” John writes that on saying those words, Jesus died.

But what did Jesus mean? *What* was finished? His life? His agony and pain? His sorrow? His ministry? We all know the rest of the story. When we think of the Resurrection that took place on Sunday morning we know that Jesus himself certainly wasn’t “finished” when he died on the cross. In fact, the story was just beginning that first Good Friday.

I was thinking on this over the past week as I was doing some reading on St. John’s gospel. In the midst of that reading, a Christian blogger I follow, Peter Leithart, published a short commentary the other day on a particular scene from Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ”. Leithart’s short commentary got my attention, because it focused on what I think is the most powerful and moving scene in the movie. Maybe you’ve seen it; maybe you haven’t. (The movie’s not for everyone.) The scene takes place as Jesus, beaten, flayed, and bloody struggles to carry his cross down the Via Dolorosa. At one point he

stumbles and falls under its weight. His mother, Mary, is there and sees him. As she pushes through the crowd to get to his side she has a flashback. We see Jesus as a little boy, stumbling and falling and Mary rushing to his side to comfort him. But as she gets to his side this time, there’s nothing she can do—no comfort to give. Instead, struggling under the weight of the cross, blood in his eyes, Jesus looks to Mary and gasps, “Behold, Mother! I make all things new.”

It’s a remarkable line to insert at that point. It’s not a line from any of the gospels. Jesus may well have said it at some point, but if he did the evangelists don’t tell us. No, it’s a line from the prophet Isaiah and it’s a line from the book of Revelation. Through Isaiah, the Lord declared to his people that one day he would end their long exile. In 43:19 he promises:

Behold, I am doing a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not
perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

And the book of Revelation ends with John’s vision of the New Jerusalem in which he sees Jesus sitting on his throne. In Revelation 21 John is given a glimpse of Creation restored and of God once again dwelling with his people. In the midst of that Jesus declares from his throne: “Behold, I make all things new.” That was the mission of Jesus: to make all things new. To restore Creation and, by his death, to ransom humanity from sin and death that we might be restored to life with him.

It’s interesting that in all these visions of re-creation we see rivers of life-giving water. In Isaiah, new

creation involves streams in the desert. In Ezekiel’s vision, the restoration of Creation is seen as a temple, perfect in every way and from which living waters flow out to the world. And in Revelation, John describes the restored creation, again with the image of a temple—this time a perfect cube, the holy of holies with no outer courts. God’s people live in his presence without restriction, and from this temple flows a river of living water. All of these visions point back to the original creation. In Genesis, Eden was the source of life. In its centre was the tree of life and from Eden flowed the four rivers that watered the surface of the earth. It’s a reminder that God’s presence is the source of life. Through sin we were cast out, but through Jesus we are welcomed back as God restores his creation and give life once again.

St. John reminds us in his gospel that Jesus came to restore creation—to make all things new. He points to it in the way he structures his gospel around seven signs, beginning with the miracle at Cana, in which he turned water into wine, and ending with the resurrection of Lazarus. Creation as depicted in Genesis 1 involved seven days. The point of that seven-day structure was to portray God’s creation as his temple. In six days he created it: the building itself, the furnishings, the implements for worship, and on the sixth day, the priests and stewards—humanity—to serve him in his temple. On the seventh day he took up his throne—his presence—in the temple, to rule as sovereign over his creation.

But in our sinful rebellion, we tried to take the temple for ourselves. And so Jesus has come to set it

right again—to *re*-create. And so John structures his gospel around these *seven* signs that point to Jesus setting creation to rights, and more specifically, restoring humanity to our rightful place in God’s temple—in his presence.

Again, think back to Genesis. God’s work of creation culminated in the creation of human beings in his image. We defaced that image in our sinful rebellion. But John begins his gospel by telling us that for our redemption, God took our humanity on himself. The Word became flesh—one of us. But while he shared our human nature, he did not share our sin. Jesus became what we were meant to be. I don’t think Pilate truly knew what he was saying as he dragged Jesus, flogged and scourged and dressed in purple and with a crown of thorns before the people. But he did so he announced to them: “Behold the man!” No one there understood. But John realised the irony of those words. To Pilate and the Jews, Jesus was just another man—and a foolish one at that. But in hindsight John could see that Jesus was the only *true* man that had ever lived since Adam. The rest of us are just fallen, sinful, rebellious half-men who have lost the image of God. But Jesus stood there before the people, *the* man, ready to restore men and women to the image and likeness of God—ready to free us from our bondage to sin and death and to restore us to the presence of God.

But on that first Good Friday, there he stood in the flesh, there he stood crowned as king, there he stood in his glory, full of grace and truth—and his people knew him not. They nailed him to a cross. And

yet that was part of the plan. On the cross he was lifted up that all might know him. The light shined in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it! As the Lord declared his work finished at the end creation, so Jesus, as he made all things new—as he re-created—declared from the cross, “It is finished.”

Genesis says that on the seventh day God rested from all the work that he had done. On the seventh day of re-creation, Jesus declared that it was finished, and he was put to rest in the tomb as he awaited the eighth day. The “eighth day”. That’s what the Church Fathers sometimes called Sunday. It’s a deliberate reference to this theme of re-creation. God created the cosmos in six days and established the seventh as the Sabbath as he rested from his work—not disengaged and napping, but engaged and ruling and sustaining his creation from his temple. But Jesus rose from the grave on the eighth day. The work of redemption was completed at the cross when Jesus declared “It is finished”, just as creation was completed on the sixth day with the creation of humanity. But that wasn’t the end of the story. In the original scheme of things, God took up his throne on the seventh day. In our rebellion we tried to topple God from his throne and to take his temple for ourselves. And so in the new scheme of things—in the re-creation—Jesus takes his throne on the eighth day. On the eighth day, having redeemed his people, he bursts from the tomb in glory and restores life to the world.

In John 7:37-38 Jesus declares, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in

me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

Brothers and sisters, in the re-creation, you and I become the restored temple. John says that when Jesus spoke of living waters he was talking about the Holy Spirit. In the Spirit, God takes up his rule and reign in the hearts of his people. Ezekiel was given a vision of re-creation when the Lord showed him that perfect temple form which streams of living water flowed to the world. Friends, the point of that vision wasn’t for there to be a perfect temple of bricks and mortar one day built. Something much greater than that has happened: God has made us his temple. In Revelation we see the heavenly city descending—a perfect cube, a holy of holies. John tells us that there in that city there is no temple—not a bricks and mortar temple, that is—because there’s no need. God’s people live there in his presence and with his presence in them in the person of the Holy Spirit. Again, God’s people are his temple.

From the temple flow rivers of living water. This is why, at the end of John’s gospel Jesus commissions his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And as God breathed his life into Adam, Jesus, the second Adam, breathed on his disciples, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit”. Brothers and sisters, Jesus has made us new, he has breathed his Spirit into us and in doing so he has made us the temple of the living God. He sends us out as a river of living water to give life to the nations.