

**It is Finished****St. John 19**

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

But what did Jesus mean? *What* was finished? His life? His ministry? His pain? His sorrow? Jesus certainly wasn't finished. God certainly wasn't finished. We know what happens three days later. In many ways, the story was just getting started that first Good Friday. So what was finished?

I woke up this morning thinking about what I, at least, think was the most powerful and moving scene in the Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ". We see Jesus making his way through the city and through the crowds, staggering under the weight of the cross. He's been beaten and flayed. He can barely stand, let alone bear the cross. As he stumbles under its weight and falls, his mother, Mary, rushes to him out of the crowd. We see a flashback. Jesus, just a little boy, trips and falls and Mary runs to him to gather him up, to see if he's hurt himself and to comfort him. But this time there's nothing Mary can do. She's helpless as her son stumbles and the weight of the heavy cross falls on him. Jesus struggles under the cross, looks up at her with blood in his eyes and gasps, "Behold, Mother, I make all things new."

It's a remarkable and insightful line to insert at that point. It's not a line from the gospels. It's a line from Isaiah and it's spoken by Jesus in 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." On Good Friday, Jesus won the decisive victory over sin and death. He broke the cycle so that he could burst forth from the tomb on Easter to restore the life of God to the world. To inaugurate the kingdom, the new creation, the long-awaited age to come. On Good Friday, on the Cross, as Jesus gave his last breath, it was finished: the old evil age dominated by sin and death was done; the kingdom of God was about to break into the world.

No one grasped it that day, but John eventually figured it out. In fact, he structures his gospel in part on this idea of creation and re-creation. Jesus' last words as he died were, "It is finished." It's the same word the writer of Genesis uses at the beginning of Genesis 2 in the Greek translation of the Old Testament when he writes that the Lord had finished his work of creation. Brothers and Sisters, the Cross of Christ is the great symbol of the faithfulness of God. The Cross declares that God will do what he has said he will do. The Cross declares that God keeps his promises. The Cross gives us reason to respond in faith to a God who is faithful.

In our Gospel last night John lifted up the death of Jesus as the ultimate act of love. Judas left the Upper Room to betray Jesus. Once he left the wheels were set turning. There was no going back. Jesus knew it. Judas left and John tells us that the next thing Jesus did was to tell his disciples: "Now the Son of Man is glorified." The Cross is the ultimate revelation of God's glory as his promises are fulfilled. The story we read in the Bible, the story going back to

Genesis is the story of how God had called the people of Israel to be his agents in overcoming the power of evil that had infected the human race. Of course, as we read the story we see that it got stuck. Israel was infected with the very same problem she was sent to answer. Israel, like everyone else, was mired in rebellion and sin. But out of that problem came the promise that God would be faithful, God would send his Messiah, his King, who would set the story back on track, would deal with Israel's failure, and would fulfil God's promise to set his Creation to rights. God is faithful. He does what he says he will do.

Even when the story went wrong, we see the faithfulness of God throughout. At Babel the people showed their idolatry and rebellion as they built their tower. God confused their languages and frustrated their rebellion and then called Abraham to be a mediator. Through him the nations would once again know their Creator. Then Israel ended up enslaved in Egypt, but God heard their cries and sent Moses to Pharaoh to demand, "Let my people go!" Through Moses, God led his people into freedom in the first Passover. Israel settled Canaan, but repeatedly faltered in her faithfulness and was overcome by pagan rulers. Each time God sent a judge to deliver his people and not just to deliver, but to call them back to faith in their God. The Philistines defeated Israel and killed Saul, her first king, but in response God raised up David to deliver the nation, to establish a kingdom, and to promise him a throne forever through an heir who would be God's own Son. Then Babylon conquered Israel and dragged her off into exile in disgrace and shame, but the Lord declared through the prophet: "Behold my servant". The great monsters of empire rose up out of the sea and God exalted the Son of Man as their judge. And now, here in our Good Friday Gospel, John shows us Jesus doing just what God had promised. John shows us how, ironically, God is sovereign even over Pilate and Caiaphas.

In our Gospel today, Rome does what it does best. Pilate mocks Jesus as a rebel king and then brutally kills him. And

yet God stands behind it all. Pilate brings Jesus out before the people and declares, “Behold your King!” And the priests and elders—they didn’t want a Messiah to upset the status quo—they declare very truthfully, even if they didn’t mean it that way, “We have no king but Caesar!” The powers of empire, Babylon and Egypt and the Philistines are all here again and before them stands the seed of Abraham, the one greater than Moses, the son of David, the servant of the Lord. And Pilate declares, “Behold, the man! Behold, your king!”

It’s remarkable when you think about it. Here’s Pilate, a jaded cynic who doesn’t even know what truth is, a representative of Caesar and his empire, and yet he unwittingly declares the truth: “Here is your king.” When the priests and elders protest, Pilate takes it a step further, “What I have written, I have written.” Caesar, his empire, and his brutal underling—just like the demons Jesus met in his ministry—they’re all under the authority of God. There’s no escaping his sovereignty, even in rebellion. The great empire is confronted by the God who calls empires to account and the empire does what empires do: it mocks and it kills. But that empire serves our sovereign God’s purpose even in its rebellion, because in doing so it proves that the God of Abraham and of Moses and of David does not fight the battle against evil with the weapons of the world, but with the weapons of love. Caesar’s victory is turned back on him and becomes the victory of God.

This is how the Cross can be the means of making all things new. John sets it out right at the beginning of his Gospel as he parallels the beginning of Genesis. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. John tells us that in the beginning was the Word and that the Word became flesh. That’s the Incarnation and in the Incarnation, God and man, heaven and earth are joined back together. John weaves the themes of creation throughout his Gospel and now on Friday, the sixth day of the week, the day when, in the original creation, God created humanity to bear

his image, Pilate puts Jesus on display dressed in a purple robe and wearing a crown of thorns and declares, “Behold the man!” And the people gathered shout in response, “Crucify him!” The true image of God appears and the world is so dead-set in its rebellion that, rather than acknowledge their Creator in Jesus, they have to get rid of him. They have to crucify the one who confronts them with the love of God that will stop at nothing to reconcile his Creation and his people to himself.

At the end of the sixth day of Creation Genesis says that the Lord finished his work and here on John’s sixth day Jesus declares that it is finished as he takes his last breath. This is why Jesus could declare, even as Judas went to betray him, that God would be glorified. This is how, as John writes in 13:1, Jesus loved his people to the end. Again, God is faithful. What he has promised, he will do.

And today we stand at the foot of the Cross and we are confronted by all of this, by God’s perfect image in Jesus, by the one who would make all things new in the power of God’s love. How will we respond? God’s kingdom has been inaugurated. The age to come and the life of God are breaking into the world. They have gone out from Jerusalem, to Judaea, to Samaria, and to the whole world. The ramifications of what Jesus has done continue to make their way through the world like shockwaves and now the shockwaves reach us. How do we—how do you and I respond? We have our own Caesars today. Pilate’s struggle to know the truth—or if there was even truth at all—continues today. Jesus and his Cross continue to challenge everything. But the good news is the same as it always has been. This is God’s story. It’s the story of his faithfulness. The love of God in Jesus, the love of God towards sinners, the love of God towards his own enemies, the love that triumphed by allowing evil to do its worst and then rising triumphant that first Easter morning, that love that transformed Jesus’ disciples, that love that changed the heart of someone like Saul of Tarsus, that love that eventually brought

Caesar’s empire to its knees in faith, that love of God that sent his own Son into the world not to condemn, but to redeem, that love is working its way through us and through our world today. This is the love that shined the most brightly when the darkness seemed about to overcome it. Because God is faithful it still shines brightly today.

This is the love that confronts us today. We stand at the foot of the Cross and here, because of God’s love, heaven and earth meet and we see Jesus making all things new. In this love we see the faithfulness of God. How do we respond? As we’ve seen Paul write in our study of Romans, God’s faithfulness demands a response of faith from us. Because he is faithful, we can confidently have faith in him. Because of his faithfulness, we are free to repent and to turn aside from everything that is not Jesus and to give him our loyalty and our lives. Because of his faithfulness, we can take hold of his love and be overcome by it so that we embody that same love for each other and for the world. Because of his faithfulness, we can take part ourselves in his new creation. Because of his faithfulness, we can be light in the darkness.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, as we kneel at the foot of your cross, help us to see and know your love for us, so that we may place at your feet all that we have and are. Amen.