



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

Good Friday: It is Finished

St. John 19:1-37 &

Hebrews 10:1-25

Fr. William Klock

April 7, 2023

There is something remarkable in the scene we remembered last night, that scene in the Upper Room as Jesus and his disciples gathered to celebrate the Passover. Someone had to wash the dust from their feet, and as the disciples bickered over who would do it, Jesus—unquestionably the one man there who deserved to have his feet washed by someone else—he took up the towel and the pitcher of water, knelt on the floor, and washed the dust, the mud, the dirt from their feet. He even washed from the feet of Judas the dust accumulated from his trip to the high priest to betray him. Here was truly the Messiah, the suffering servant who came to wash his people clean from their sins. Peter drew back. “No Lord! You can’t wash my feet! If anything, I should be washing yours.” But Jesus insisted. This is what he’d come to do.

Jesus turned everything upside-down. After washing the disciples’ feet—something totally inappropriate for a teacher to do to his disciples—he took the bread and the wine of the Passover meal and started talking about them as a new sacrifice. These men knew all about sacrifices. They knew all about bulls and goats and lambs sacrificed for sin, their bodies broken and their blood poured out

before the altar. And yet Jesus took the bread and wine and said that it was his body broken and his blood poured out—that they were all on the verge of a new exodus, but this time he would be the Passover lamb, his body and blood would be broken to free them from the slavery of sin and death. From what the Gospels tell us, the disciples didn’t understand. Not at this point. They really did want to follow Jesus, they wanted what he had to offer, but they didn’t understand yet what it was he was offering. When Jesus had tried to wash Peter’s feet, Peter had indignantly refused, but Jesus explained that he needed it—that if we wanted any part in his master, this washing was essential—then Peter wanted it—even wanted more of it (“Wash all of me, not just my feet, Lord!”)—but he still didn’t understand what it meant. He just trusted Jesus and wanted what he was offering.

After supper Jesus took his friends to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. Even after the foot washing and that last supper and all Jesus’ talk about servants and sacrifices, they still didn’t understand. They had no idea what was going to happen. They knelt among the olive trees as Jesus went off a little way away to pray by himself. And as Jesus prayed like he’d never prayed before, the disciples drifted off to sleep. They had no idea what was happening. Jesus woke them up in time for Judas to return, leading a pack of Jewish soldiers who had come to take him away. Peter drew out his sword, ready for the attack, and cut off the ear of one of the soldiers. Maybe he thought that now was the time Jesus, the conquering Messiah, was going to throw off his clever disguise of humility and start the

revolution that everyone expected. Now was his chance! But it didn’t happen. In fact, Jesus actually healed the soldier and told Peter: “I can appeal to my Father and he’ll send twelve legions of angels. But if I did that, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled?”

The disciples ran away as the chief priest’s soldiers took Jesus away in chains. They figured it was over. Chalk Jesus up as yet another failed Messiah. But Peter wasn’t ready to give up on his friend, so he followed along to the high priest’s house to see what would happen. He watched the sham trial they put Jesus through. They condemned Jesus, and as the priests and soldiers spit on him and struck him, Peter gave up just like the other disciples had done a few hours before. Three bystanders noticed Peter in the crowd and recognised him: “Hey, you! You were with him. You’re one of his friends. You’re one of his followers.” And each time Peter denied knowing Jesus: “I don’t know what you’re talking about! You must be blind! I’ve never seen this man before!” Jesus was betrayed by even his closest friends.

When it was morning, the Jews dragged Jesus to the court of the Roman governor. The Jews weren’t allowed to execute anyone; the Romans had to do it. And so Jesus went through another sham trial before Pilate who caved in to pressure from the Jews. He didn’t want a riot on his hands and the Jews were crying for blood—and not just blood—they were crying out for a Roman crucifixion. Pilate asked them, “But this man is King of the Jews?” And they shouted back, “No he’s not! We have no king but Caesar!” We can only

imagine how surprised Pilate and his soldiers were at that acclamation. Or how saddened Jesus was by it. The Lord was Israel's king, not Caesar, but they were so angry with him, they were so set on their rejection of Jesus the Messiah that they would do the unthinkable and give their allegiance to Caesar. On Sunday the crowd outside the city had hailed him as King, but now their voices were drowned out by this great hoard calling for his blood. Not wanting trouble, Pilate gave them what they wanted.

His soldiers, the whole battalion, took Jesus to be scourged. They spit on him, they put a reed in his hand and a crown plaited of thorns on his head and mocked him as king, and then they beat him senseless. They led him away with two violent thugs, revolutionaries, very possibly from Barabbas' gang. On a hilltop just outside the city, the soldiers held Jesus down on a cross while they nailed him to it with spikes through his wrists and through his feet. Then they raised the cross up and dropped it heavily into the ground. His mother and his friends watched as his blood poured and as he struggled for breath. For three long hours he hung there. Roman crucifixion was known for its agony. The shoulders were dislocated. Hanging, you couldn't breathe. So you pushed yourself up, putting all your weight on the spike through your feet to gasp for air—alternating between the agony of asphyxiation and the agony of being nailed to a piece of timber. After three hours Jesus cried out in anguish to his Father, "It is finished." And just to make sure he was dead, John says the soldiers pierced his side with a spear.

Blood and water gushed out from the wound. Not what anyone would normally expect, but a detailed noted by John. Maybe to stress the reality of Jesus' body, because there were those at the time John wrote who claimed that Jesus' body had only been an illusion. I expect that as John saw blood pour from Jesus' side, he couldn't help but remember the blood pouring from the animals sacrificed in the temple, and as the wind sprinkled Jesus blood on the group gathered at the foot of the cross, John remembered standing in the temple as the priests sprinkled the blood of bulls and goats on him and the gathered people.

The clouds darkened the sky. The earth shook. The curtain in the temple that closed off the holy of holies, the place of the Lord's presence, was violently torn in two. The graves gave up their dead, who went walking through the streets of Jerusalem. Something remarkable had happened and everyone noticed, but no one understood—except maybe that centurion who confessed, "Surely this man is the son of God!" The city was shorty back to its business. Jesus' friends wept in sadness or in anger, and they went home to lay low lest the authorities come after them next.

That evening Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to claim the body of Jesus. They took it down from the cross, wrapped it in linen, placed it in a tomb, and sealed it up.

Maybe now the disciples started to ponder what Jesus was talking about last night when he had talked about his body and blood being given as a new—as a perfect—sacrifice. In our epistle lesson

from the tenth chapter of Hebrews, we read some more about the nature of Jesus' sacrifice. The Law and the old sacrifices were but a shadow of the good things to come. "It can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:1-4).

The blood of bulls and goats, sacrificed over and over, could only convict the people of sin as it pointed to the perfect sacrifice of Christ that had not yet been made. And so Hebrews 10 says that Jesus came to do "away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"(Hebrews 10:9-10). The writer of Hebrews goes on to give us a vivid picture contrasting the old and the new: "Every priest [and he's talking about the priests of the old covenant] stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sin. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:11-14).

Jeremiah wrote, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the

Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds...I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” And Hebrews reminds us, “Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin” (Hebrews 10:16-18).

When Jesus breathed his last and cried out, “It is finished,” it *was* finished. Whereas in the old covenant the priest laid the sins of the people on the bulls and goats sacrificed repeatedly on the altar, Jesus, our great High Priest, took our sins upon himself and died the death that we deserved. The old sacrifices were imperfect. They were just dumb animals, but consider too that those animals didn’t offer their lives willingly. That’s the difference between the old sacrifices and the once-for-all new sacrifice made by Jesus. In the shed blood of Jesus we find perfection—God Incarnate shed his own blood and he did so of his own free will. For that reason, there’s no longer any need for more sacrifices. Again, Jesus did it *once* and for *all*. The old covenant called for the sinner to humbly lay his sins on that animal sacrifice, but that bull or that goat on the altar of the Temple was a sign given by the Lord—it was his finger pointing to Jesus the Messiah—pointing to the cross. Brothers and Sisters, because God has been faithful to his promises, no more do we bring an annual sacrifice to the temple. Now the humble sinner need only trust in the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

When Jesus breathed his last and gave himself up to his Father, the temple served its last function in redemptive history. Under the old

covenant the holy of holies—the most holy place—was where the presence of the Lord resided visibly for the people, resting on the ark of the covenant. And yet the people weren’t allowed into that place—into the direct presence of the Lord. Only the high priest was allowed there and then only once a year. No sinful human being could enter the presence of the Lord and the priest only did it to make an annual sacrifice for sins—and he did so only after a series of purification rituals for himself. Nobody went there, because sinners can never enter the presence of a holy, just, and righteous God.

But when Jesus made his perfect sacrifice on the cross that day—as he breathed his last and pronounced, “It is finished”—the heavy veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the people was torn in two. By his death, Jesus opened the way into the presence of the Father. Through Jesus sinners now find perfect forgiveness and are welcomed into the presence of his Father.

On the cross Jesus stretched out his hands; he stretched out one hand to all those who had trusted in him, seeing the future and coming Messiah as they made their sacrifices at the Temple. And with his other hand Jesus reached out to us, reaches out to the Gentiles, to the nations who had never heard of the Messiah. On the cross he reaches out with both hands, uniting both peoples to himself, establishing his body by giving new life to dead and paralysed limbs through his shed body and blood. Jesus said, “When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). That’s

exactly what he did. In fact, it’s exactly what he still does. He stretches out his hands to draw us in, to unite us to himself. Through his perfect sacrifice he offers perfect forgiveness of sin. Through his body and his blood he offers new and eternal life. Through his Holy Spirit he renews and regenerates hearts and minds and leads us on the path of holiness. And through his cross, he leads us through the torn veil and into the holy of holies—into the very presence of God.