

## **IT IS FINISHED**

GOOD FRIDAY 2011

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Then Jesus, having uttered a loud cry, breathed his last breath. Those last words according to the Gospel of Luke are, "It is finished." Even though we do not read Luke's version tonight I found myself haunted by those words as I thought about this sermon. Leaving those words out of this version of the Passion is the only thing I regret about what is a masterful working of this dramatic scene. Why are these three words so important to me and ultimately to all of us? That moment on the cross when Jesus dies, the Temple curtain is torn, what was hidden is revealed and the world as the people of the 1<sup>st</sup> century knew it was finished, changed forever.

The problem is that so many in the church do not take the time to really live Holy Week and because of that I do not think that we as a whole truly understand Easter. If we did, I think Easter would be a bigger celebration than Christmas and to be honest it should be!

This lack of understanding about the true power of this season was brought to mind to me for the first time several years ago when I was standing in the narthex during coffee hour talking with parish member in a church in suburban Washington D.C. Kelly was telling me about a co-worker of hers who is Moslem. She said that they often have deep theological discussions as they try to understand two different religions and traditions. Kelly was puzzled and wanted some suggestions on how to respond to one particular question. Her co-worker asked her about Holy week and in particular Good Friday. Now think about the fact that Kelly a good faithful church member wanted help to explain what Holy Week was about or why it existed. I suspect many more than her coworker fail to understand Holy Week.

Why do you celebrate the day your greatest prophet was killed? Why do you call it good, wasn't it an awful day? Why not skip it and just celebrate Easter. Many non-Christians might well ask and many Christians do ask that question. In fact many do just skip it. I was amused the other day to drive by a church that had their sign proclaiming "He is risen" on Maundy Thursday morning.

The first problem is that most of our culture skips over the religious meaning of Easter the heck with Good Friday. I was standing in line at Barnes and Noble the other day waiting to check out. I was looking at a display of Easter books and material and just stood there shaking my head. The woman behind me in line asked what was the matter. I said, "A whole table about Easter and not one Christian symbol to be found, just the pagan images that our society associates with Easter." Silence greeted that remark as she turned and just stared at me in total confusion. I

wasn't in collar, just my usual jeans and sweater. There was a book titled Easter Images and not a word about Christ. Just spring pictures, flowers, bunnies and Easter Eggs. If we as a culture don't understand Easter then Good Friday is truly incomprehensible.

Why the cross? Why did it happen? What does it mean? What is Good Friday all about? First of all Kelly's friend was partly correct, it is an awful day, but not in the way we usually use the word awful.

Think instead that this is an awe filled day. This is a day when God acted in a totally shocking way. One of the readings for Morning Prayer on Good Friday is the story of Abraham and Isaac. In this story Abraham has gone up on the mountain to sacrifice Isaac as God instructed him.

The awe filled moment on Good Friday is that this time there is no angel to prevent the Abraham in all of us from making this great mistake. No blaze of glory, no holy messenger to stop us from crucifying the Son of God. No vision, no moment of clarity that causes us to stop what we are doing. God allows it to happen. If you read the Gospel of John, God planned it. God knew what we needed then and knows what we need now, even if we do not see it.

In the midst of the shock and awe there is disillusionment. In many respects it is a day of disillusionment. The disciples and the women are in shock, they have stood at the foot of the cross and watched all the prophecies come true. Bystanders cry, "If you are the son of God, come down from the cross," yet Jesus hangs there in pain and agony. He doesn't come down from the cross.

The harsh reality to those gathered at the foot of the cross in that moment, is that Jesus, the Jesus that they knew is gone and they do not know what lies ahead. He has certainly given them all kinds of hints and promises, but in that awful moment they have forgotten all of those statements and teachings. The pages and pages of the final discourse that we read in the gospel of John are but dim memories even though the disciples heard these only a day earlier.

Being disillusioned is not a bad thing however. Disillusionment also means the shattering of illusions. Disillusionment means the absence of illusion and the disciples desperately needed to have their illusions shattered. We need to have our illusions shattered as well. Disillusionment means that we can now see clearly. It is only through the cross that the disciples and we see the true nature of Christ.

Without a cross, without Good Friday there is no Easter. Without Good Friday there is no death of the human Jesus and the resurrection of the Son of God for all to witness and celebrate.

So what is finished?

The cross is a journey toward vulnerability. When threatened our natural instinct is to wrap our arms around ourselves to somehow shield our bodies from our enemies, but on the cross the arms are stretched wide. There is no protection from whatever insult the soldiers wanted to do. It is a total sacrifice and acceptance that someone else has total control of what will happen.

Jesus' walk to the cross was a journey toward vulnerability. Just as with the temptation stories we heard early in Lent he could have chosen a different way, yet even now, as the devil has returned at a more opportune time, Jesus remains vulnerable; vulnerable and obedient.

The cross is about obedience. Jesus' obedience to the Father and the example to us of our call to be obedient to the Father. God did not stand by and let someone else die on the cross, he sent his son to do that.

So what is finished?

What is finished is our sense of self. Not in the sense of a healthy sense of self, but in a self that is selfish. The cross is all about surrendering what we want and becoming open to what God wants.

This service will continue in just a few moments with the reading of the solemn collects. Jesus came, lived with and was crucified for us, to finish many things that needed to be finished. These collects leave us aware of what is not yet finished and yet to be done. What is finished or what God wants to be finished is all the sinful ways we continue to live in. Then we can begin to attack those things that need, that demand our attention. There is also though the glimpse of the kingdom that God desires for us his beloved children.

As we kneel in front of the plain wooden cross in a few minutes take that time to ask yourself what in my life does Christ want to be finished. What does Jesus want me to place on the cross today; right now? Then thank God that Christ who has already died for you will take those things unto himself so that they no longer burden your soul.

Then you can say, "It is finished."