

OF REDEMPTION

John 19:17-30

Fifth Wednesday in Lent

April 3, 2019

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 19, verses 17 through 30. This gospel lesson records the central event in all of history. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 19, beginning at verse 17, we read in Jesus' name.

¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, ²⁴ so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

"They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "**Woman, behold, your son!**" ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "**Behold, your mother!**" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "**I thirst.**" ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "**It is finished,**" and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

God died. That's what we just read. God died. "He said, '**It is finished,**' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (19:30). This is the center of human history. It is the central part of redemption. It is the central moment in the Bible. It is the central moment in all of history. "[Jesus] bowed his head and gave up his spirit." God died. What does this mean?

I'm going to do something here that I also do with the confirmation students. I should have started it two weeks ago when we covered the first article of the creed, but I forgot, so we'll make up a little ground here. I like to reduce the explanations in the *Small Catechism* down to their most basic sentence. If you want to follow along, you can do so on page 97 of the hymnal.

And you probably do want to follow along. This is one of those things where, if you decide to just listen and not read along, by the time I get halfway through this part, you're going to wish you were following along. Then you'll wonder what page we're on. And you may or may not remember that it's page 97. So I hope you follow along ... on page 97.

For each of the three articles, Luther writes a paragraph explanation. They're close to equal in length. And each paragraph consists of just two sentences: one really long run-on sentence, followed by a short and simple sentence, which is identical in all three explanations: "This is most certainly true." That's the part the confirmation students almost always get right. But the longer part—the run-on sentence before it—is a little harder. So I find it helpful to reduce it to its simplest form and then build it up again. We take out all the subordinating clauses, the prepositional phrases, and a whole bunch of other grammatical pieces. Basically, we just look for the subject, verb, and object of the sentence. We reduce it to its simplest form.

So if you're on page 97, at the bottom, under "What does this mean?" look for the most basic form of the sentence. I suppose, if you want to get really technical, you might say it's simply, "I believe." That is a sentence. But let's go one level deeper: I believe what? Add in the next basic clause. Keep it as short as grammatically possible. What do you come up with? It's, "I believe that God has created me." That's the simplest sentence we can reduce the meaning of the first article down to. "I believe that God has created me." Then, after we establish that, we go on to add in that he has also created "all that exists." Then it elaborates on the different parts of the human person, all of which God has created. Then it adds in all the things around us: other people and property. Then it confesses that God also preserves these things. It confesses why God does all this: "out of fatherly and divine mercy." Lastly it confesses our responsibility "to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him." That's what we get when we add it all in, but we start with, "I believe God has created me."

That was a good practice run, because the second and third articles are a bit harder. In the first article, the basic phrase is right at the beginning. All we have to do is read until we get to the first place we can stop. But in the second and third articles, there are phrases we have to skip over before we get to that point. Tonight we'll look at the meaning of the second article. Your homework for next week is to look at the meaning of the third article and reduce it to its simplest form. If you find it and you want to show off, grab me sometime before the service and tell me what you come up with.

But tonight, the meaning of the second article. So flip over to page 98, or you can look at it in the bulletin; the text is the same. What is the basic phrase in the meaning of the second article? Find the basic elements of the sentence. Reduce it to its simplest form. You should come up with something like this: "I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord." You see it? "I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord." We had to skip over a few phrases, but that's the most basic sentence.

Now let's add in the rest by answering a few simple questions. I'll ask the questions and answer them, but I want you to follow along and answer them in your head. Maybe mouth the words if you want to keep yourself honest.

First, who is Jesus Christ? This is where we add in the part we skipped. Jesus is "true God" and "true man." How is he true God? He was "begotten of the father from eternity." And how is he true man? He was "born of the Virgin Mary." That's what we covered last week. Jesus is true God and true man.

Then we get to what Jesus did. How did Jesus become your Lord? He "has redeemed me."

Then we have this little side comment. What does the second article teach us about ourselves? I am "a lost and condemned creature." That means I fall under the wrath of God. I am

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a slave to something else. If Jesus is going to become my Lord, he will have to redeem me out of this slavery, for I am “a lost and condemned creature.”

And what does it mean that he redeemed me? What is another way of saying that? He “bought me and freed me.” The picture here is of a slave being purchased for the purpose of being set free.

And what three things are we freed from? “From all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil.” Notice what we are set free from. It doesn’t say that we are set free from everything. We are not set free from God’s authority. Freedom is not the same thing as autonomy. We don’t become independent free agents. Christ doesn’t free us to go and do whatever we want and be whomever we want. If that were true, we would very quickly return to sin, and we would again be in slavery to sin, death, and the power of the devil. When there are forces out there that are capable of enslaving us, it is impossible to be autonomous or independent. The only way to be free from sin, death, and the power of the devil is to belong to someone else. We will not survive on our own. We must belong to someone who can keep us from being enslaved once again. So, being set free from sin, death, and the power of the devil, we become the property of Christ. More on that in a moment.

But before that, how did Jesus redeem us? Did he use silver and gold? No. By the way, the confirmation students always get that one right. They’re pretty good at yes or no questions. Sin, death, and the devil do not accept silver and gold as currency. Jesus had to use something more valuable. He had to use something with enough power to overcome the claim that sin, death, and the devil have on us.

So what did Jesus use? “His holy and precious blood.” And what else? “His innocent sufferings and death.” That is, he offered himself in our place. He subjected himself to sin and death for us. He satisfied the claim that sin and death have on us. He paid our debt with his own blood. And, thus, he overcame the power of the devil. He silenced all of the devil’s accusations against us. He redeemed us “with His holy and precious blood and with His innocent sufferings and death.”

And why did Jesus do this? There are three reasons. What is the first purpose? Why did he redeem us? “In order that I might be his own.” Now we’re coming back to that slavery issue. He did not free us in order for us to become masters of our own destiny. We would simply return to slavery. So he made us his own. He became our Lord. And he did not make us his own for his benefit. It is really for our benefit that Jesus claims ownership over us. We are the ones who would suffer if Jesus were not our Lord. To “be his own” is the best thing for us.

And why else did Jesus redeem us? “In order that I might ... live under him in his kingdom.” This is not a matter of bolstering his kingdom with more population. The power of Jesus’ kingdom lies not in its population, but solely in Christ. He, himself, is the kingdom’s power. This is for our benefit, because his kingdom is the only good and perfect kingdom. It’s not so much that he takes us for his kingdom, but that he gives his kingdom to us. We live under him, but we also reign with him. The kingdom is not only his, but it is also ours.

And what is the third purpose for which Jesus redeemed us? “In order that I might ... serve him.” Is this some kind of harsh, forced servitude? Do we serve him forever against our will? No. He creates a new will so that we “serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” This is a willing and joyful obedience to Christ. It becomes our great pleasure and honor to serve him. Again, this is really for our good.

And what is the model for this eternal life? How do we know that Jesus is capable of giving us all this? It is because “He is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity.” Having

redeemed us through his death, he did not remain dead, but he exercised his power over death by rising from the dead. He carried our sins into death, left them there, and rose victorious over death. Thus he is able to give eternal life to all who trust in him, and he does. We have confidence that death is not the end. Our Lord has been to death. He has passed through it. And he will lead his redeemed people through it as well. And so we will live with him and like him for all eternity.

And that brings us to the end of the second great run-on sentence of the catechism. I suppose what we just did here was explain the explanation of the second article of the Apostles' Creed. If it wasn't clear enough, perhaps sometime I will have to explain the explanation of the explanation. Or, what I would recommend instead, memorize the explanation from the catechism. Perhaps you still remember it from confirmation class. I hope you do. More likely, you remember bits and pieces. They might be very small pieces, but try to put them back together.

We make our confirmands memorize it, because we want them to have it for life. It takes some work to memorize, but once you have it, you'll be glad you do. And once you have it, it is much easier to refresh it in your brain than memorize anew.

It can be hard, but as I watch students struggle to memorize it, I am thankful for the last sentence and its simplicity. They all know the last part. So when we go through it in class, and they stumble through the run-on sentence, they can at least add their hearty "amen" at the end. They can hear me or their classmates mumble through it, while they pretend by moving their lips. Then they remember, *Oh yeah, that's right*, and they can confess it all in one simple sentence: "This is most certainly true!"

Now, at the center of this article is Jesus' death. That's the key event. That is how he redeemed us. God died. Think about the depth of that statement. God died. That's what we're talking about here. The eternal Son of God—the Word through whom heaven and earth were created—he took on human flesh. He was rejected. He suffered. He died. God died. If we didn't know any better, we would think this is impossible. But it happened. And it happened for a reason: your redemption. Jesus' death accomplished your redemption.

That's what the words, "**It is finished,**" mean. In Greek it's actually just one word: *Τετέλεσται (tetelestai)*. And it means much more than even three English words can capture. "Finished" doesn't just mean that it's over. Jesus isn't saying his life is over. He means that his work is finished. It is completed. His mission has reached its end. The purpose has been fulfilled. The goal has been reached. Your redemption has been earned. That's what the word "finished" means.

And the word has a very special verb tense. In English we have past, present, and future tense verbs. We can say, "It *was* finished," "It *is* finished," or "It *will be* finished." But Greek has a special kind of verb that basically combines the past and present tenses into one. We call it the "perfect tense." And that's the form of the word *τετέλεσται*. It means that it *was* finished—the fulfillment is in the past—but it also *continues to be* finished. It is a present reality. The benefits are ongoing. Jesus accomplished our redemption in the past. This is a historical certainty. And our redemption stands in the present. We were redeemed, and we are redeemed. This is all wrapped up in the word *τετέλεσται*. It's historical. It is a present reality. And this present reality will remain true for all of eternity. It carries on into the future.

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Christ redeemed you “with his holy and precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death.” This is as true and certain as any historical fact. And it remains true today and into eternity forever. This is most certainly true. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.