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John 19:17-30

Holy Thursday (Good Friday texts, Series B)

April 1, 2021

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 19, verses 17 through 30. 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.

Dear saints of God in Jesus Christ,

This is your salvation. In this text you hear of the body of Christ, broken for you. You hear of the blood of Christ, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. By all appearances, this is a miserable day. This is your salvation.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each record the crucifixion of Jesus. And they all add something unique to the story. Some of the most significant passages are the words Jesus spoke from the cross. When we compile those words from across the four gospels, we get seven words

from the cross. Matthew and Mark both have one, and it's the same one. Luke has three, all of them unique to his gospel. And here John has three, all of them unique to his gospel. Tonight we will look at the three words or statements John records of Jesus on the cross.

The first is directed toward the mother of Jesus, Mary, and the disciple whom Jesus loved, whom we learn at the end of the gospel is the disciple who wrote it (21:24). That is, the apostle John.

John never names himself in his gospel. He names Peter, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, Thomas, and Judas. He refers once to himself, along with his brother James, as “the sons of Zebedee” (21:2). But he never names himself. Instead, when he appears in the account, he typically refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

We might take that to mean that Jesus loved John more than the other disciples. That would make this a rather boastful thing for John to call himself. But I don't think that's what's going on. In modern usage, we often understand the word “love” to be a stronger form of the word “like.” So we take this to mean that Jesus strongly liked John more than the others. But that's not the way the Bible speaks of love. The Bible speaks of love in terms of action, especially sacrificial action. And that's the kind of love John is talking about when he identifies himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” He does this about a half dozen times in his gospel, and all of them are surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection. So as John writes his very lengthy passion narrative, he writes it understanding that everything Jesus is doing is an act of love for him. He recognizes himself as someone who is not worthy of Jesus' favor, but Jesus does all things out of love. And this love, John teaches us in chapter 3(16), is not for him only, but for the entire world. So when John identifies himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” he's confessing that everything Jesus is doing in his passion is an act of love. He views the passion very personally, and we should too.

So in the first word from the cross, Jesus says to his mother, “**Woman, behold, your son!**” Then he says to John, “**Behold, your mother!**” (19:26-27). What is Jesus doing here? He's keeping the Fourth Commandment. He's looking after his mother.

The last time we hear anything of Joseph is when they go to Jerusalem when Jesus is twelve (Luke 2:41-52). And we conclude from the silence after that event, along with Jesus' directions here, that Joseph has probably died. The ancient world could be a difficult place for widows. So if the husband died, the obligation to take care of the widow fell to her oldest son. But now Mary is watching as her oldest son dies. Where are Jesus' brothers? We don't really know. They should be there with her, but they're not. And we can only speculate why. But John, the disciple of Jesus, is there. So Jesus gives John to his mother, and he gives his mother to John.

He does this in accordance with the Fourth Commandment. That's the one that says, “Honor your father and your mother” (Ex. 20:12). Most often, we think of this commandment in terms of children under a certain age being submissive and obedient to their parents. And the commandment obviously includes that. But the Fourth Commandment never expires. When we grow up and leave the house, we still have a divine obligation to love and honor our parents. Even after our parents die, we honor them by defending their reputation and thanking God for them. Here Jesus loves and honors his mother by ensuring her care after his death. This is one of the ways adult children honor their parents. Just as parents provide for the physical needs of their children when they are young, there often comes a time later in life when the roles are strangely reversed, and adult children take care of their aging parents. That is what Jesus is doing here. He won't be there to take care of his mother, so he assigns that responsibility to John. John obeyed

Jesus, and from that moment he took her to his own home. That is, she became part of his family, and he fulfilled the obligation of a son to her.

We see from this that Jesus is fulfilling the Law, all of it, even as he is being crucified. He was, at that very moment, fulfilling the Fourth Commandment in our place. We fail to keep this commandment. We disobey our parents when we are young, we sometimes ignore them when we are adults, and sometimes we neglect them when they are elderly. We break this commandment all life long. Jesus fulfilled it in our place. One of the many ways he kept it was by ensuring his mother's care after his death. That's the first word from the cross.

Sometime after this first word, we don't know how long, exactly—it could have been a few minutes; it may have been several hours—but toward the end, Jesus says, “**I thirst**” (19:28). This is the second word John records.

Jesus knew that the end was upon him. All was now finished, and we'll talk about what that means in a moment, so he said, “**I thirst**.” And John comments that Jesus said this “to fulfill the Scripture” (19:28). It's not entirely clear what Scripture John is referring to, and it's not because there aren't any, but because there are a couple possibilities.

One possibility could be Psalm 22. It's a Psalm of David, and it is a prophetic psalm of Christ's passion. It maybe has the most prophetic significance of any psalm. In verse 1 David says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” You might recognize that as the word from the cross that Matthew and Mark record (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). And in John 19, our text this evening, when the soldiers divide up Jesus clothes, John says this was to fulfill Psalm 22:18: “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” And in Psalm 22:15, David writes, prophetically, “My strength is dried up like a potsher, and my tongue sticks to my jaws.” So that may be the Scripture Jesus fulfills when he says, “**I thirst**.”

The other possibility is Psalm 69. This is also a Psalm of David. In verse 21 he says, “They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.” And immediately after Jesus says, “**I thirst**,” they put a sponge full of sour wine on a hyssop branch and raise it to his lips. So it may be that by saying, “**I thirst**,” Jesus causes one of the soldiers to fulfill this Psalm.

John could have either of these verses in mind. The point remains the same: God knew the event of the cross, and he even ordained it, long before it came to pass. From ancient times, and even from the foundation of the world, this was God's plan to redeem his fallen creation from the curse. And when we say this was God's plan, we mean all three persons of the Trinity. It was not God the Father's plan to force the Son to do this. But it was the plan and purpose that belonged to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from eternity past. This event, right here, of Jesus suffering, thirsting, crying out, and dying, is the salvation God promised long ago.

Jesus' thirst also gives us a glimpse into his suffering. He suffered as a man. He did not use his divine power to spare himself from anything. Everything human beings suffer, Jesus endured it. And beyond the things we suffer, he endured far more. The cross is a pain that we will likely never endure. It's also unlikely that we will ever have to endure anything else on that level of physical suffering. And beyond the pain of the cross, Jesus endured the condemnation of God and separation from his Father. But the thirsting is just a little glimpse into the physical suffering Jesus endured.

I think we have a tendency to think of Jesus as being on another level than us, like he rises above all the things we experience as humans. And according to his divine nature, and according to his perfect righteousness, he does rise above us. But he also willingly lowered himself to our

place. By accepting our human nature, he lowered himself to bear all the things we bear. He did not use his divine power to shield himself from the pain of human death. He lowered himself to suffer all the things we suffer. And he suffered them well. He suffered with us and for us. We see this in the second word, “I thirst.”

After receiving the sour wine, there is one more word: “**It is finished.**” What is finished? Jesus’ life? Jesus’ suffering? Is he saying, “Oh good, I’m dying, now I don’t have to suffer anymore”? No. That’s not it. His work of salvation is finished. This plan and purpose of God, which he knew from eternity past, and which he revealed through the prophets, was now completed. In Jesus’ suffering and death, “**It is finished.**”

In Greek this really is just one word: **Τετέλεσται**. It doesn’t simply mean that something is over. This is one of those pregnant words. There’s a lot in it. It also means to complete or even perfect something. It gets translated in the present tense, “**It is finished,**” but it’s really a special kind of past tense verb. The verb tense indicates a past action, but one that has lasting results. And that’s why it often gets translated into English with the present tense. Jesus finished his work of redemption, and it stands completed forever. When Jesus says, **Τετέλεσται**, “**It is finished,**” it’s a declaration of success. It’s not just over. It’s done, and it’s done right.

It’s the difference between doing something because you have to and doing something for the goal of the finished product. We all know what it’s like to do something just because we have to. You don’t want to do it, but you have to, so you do it, and when you’re done you say, “Well that’s over.” And then you just forget about it. You put it in your past and you go on to the next thing. Doing your taxes or your homework might feel this way. But there are other things that we do for the goal of the finished product. It’s more of a joy to do these things. Even if they involve hard work or even suffering, we joyfully endure it for the goal of the finished product. And these are the things that we really want to do right, because we’re not going to put these things in our rearview mirrors, we want to have the finished product, and we want to enjoy them for a long time. It’s the sort of thing that, when you’re done, you don’t say, “It’s over.” You say, “It’s finished.” If it’s something like a perfect quilt or finely crafted birdhouse, you stand there for a moment admiring your work. And whenever you see it, you enjoy that satisfaction of having completed the thing. You didn’t just get it over with, you completed it. You have it. It continues to be finished.

That’s the kind of thing Jesus is talking about when he says, “**It is finished.**” He has accomplished something. He has completed his project. And what is it that he has completed? Your salvation. Your forgiveness. All of that suffering had a purpose. Bowing his head and giving up his spirit had a purpose. It wasn’t just something he had to go through. He was crafting your salvation. His suffering and death was his work. It was his payment to purchase you as his own. He does not put his suffering in the rearview mirror. He does not put you in his rearview mirror and go on the next thing. This is the thing. Purchasing you as his own is the thing. He does this so that he will have you as his own for all eternity. He does this so that he can give to you his perfect righteousness and his incorruptible life for all eternity. “He said, ‘**It is finished,**’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (19:30).

That is, he suffered death. His heart stopped pumping blood. His lungs stopped breathing air. His brain stopped sending impulses. Jesus died. God died. Body and soul were separated. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, suffered human death.

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This is your salvation. By all appearances, this was a miserable day. This is your salvation. The body of Christ was broken for you. The blood of Christ was poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. And today—this day—Christ delivers this gift to you for your salvation. Amen.

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