

Good Friday

John 19:1-42

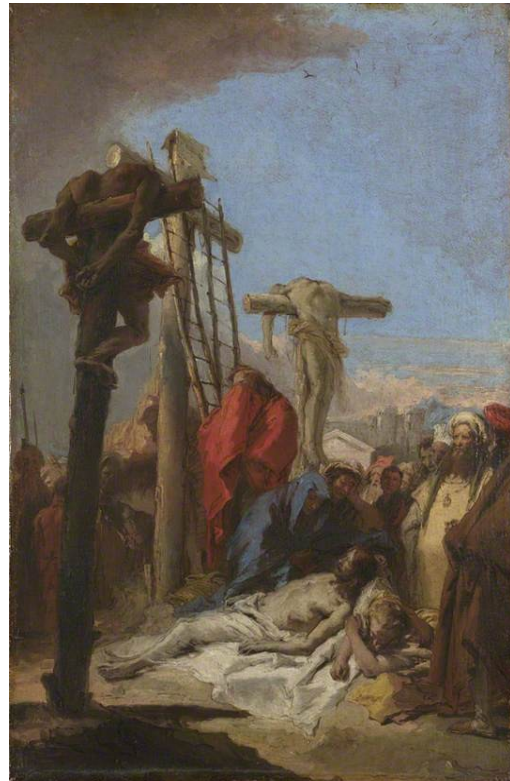
April 2, 2021

It is Finished

The cross is the summary of the whole eternal fight against the powers of darkness. The cross is the focal point onto which everything runs together. From below the cross, from the abyss and from earth, climbs up all evil and sin in

existence, and it comes together in the cross. The people all lift their voices and their hands against Him, “Crucify Him!” Every rebellious thought, they all converge in this moment, at that place, on that Person. It’s like all sin is compressed and condensed into this most terrible spectacle there on Golgotha.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”¹ That is never more clear than seeing God hanging dead on a cross. The world looks at the cross and sees defeat. Even more than defeat, the world sees shame and contempt. The cross was devised not only to subject its victims to agonizing pain, but also to put them on display. Even before crucifixion the



¹ Is 55:8-9.

victim would have been subject to a humiliating and excruciating form of torture known as scourging – what the Romans called “the intermediate death.” The Victim would have been stripped of His clothes, His hands tied and back bent, bound to a column or a stake in front of the praetorium, which was the official residence of the governor who as we know was Pontus Pilate. In this way Jesus was flogged, and then the soldiers taunted Him with a purple robe, which symbolized royalty, and a roughly shoved a crown of thorns on His head. They struck Him and mockingly called Him the King of the Jews. Pilate of course approved all this, in fact he ordered most of it, and some of it we can chalk up the masochism of the soldiers who were assigned to carry out these horrible tasks.

Crucifixion typically took place in a public location, along a road perhaps, to maximize the number of people who would see it. That had a great deterrent effect. Don't get out of line or you'll end up like this guy. It also magnified the indignity of crucifixion. While dying, crowds would pass and sneer. That is exactly what Christ encountered. He was scorned and ridiculed even while dying to save the very people who were berating him. This makes no sense. God dead on the cross. God humiliated and ashamed. God put on display to be mocked and trampled under the feet of ungrateful sinners. It makes no sense because God's thoughts are not your thoughts and His ways are not your ways. But in fact, all these things are for your very salvation. Jesus is beaten and struck so that we may beat back Satan, who had us beat, and so that we might escape the sin that clings to us through from the original transgression. All these things we deserved – the suffering, the shame, the humility – and yet He bore them in our stead.

According to St. John three times Pilate says “I find no fault in Him.” Three times Pilate judged rightly. There is no fault in Christ, for that is not why He is about to be subject to all of these terrible things which will take His life. We prayed in our opening collect that Almighty God would behold this his family – all of us – for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed. We prayed this because the whole human family needs what happens on Good Friday, for Christ is not the guilty one. We are. So do not look upon Christ with pity, do not feel sorry for Him and lament His innocence like the women who followed Him from Jerusalem and were chided and told by Christ that it would be better to weep for themselves and for their children. Jesus does not want your pity. He does not need your pity. Rather, behold Jesus on the cross knowing that here we view sin rightly in all of it’s horrible consequence. Our human family in its sinful rebellion put the Lord to death.

This is why what happened on the cross over those terrible dark hours came to pass. Through the Words of the evangelist we behold our justification. For the same cross that serves as the focal point for all sin and evil is also the cross that carries our Redeemer, the Lord Christ. “In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”² He carries in His body all that God’s heart holds, and it is full of grace, of life, of salvation. Here, where sin reaches its height and is its most devilish, there Christ shines in victory in the one crucial clash. When His holy and precious blood flows out from the wood of the cross, then victory is won. In a way beyond our understanding, the power of God brought an end from Christ’s passion far different from that intended by his enemies. The cross that

² Col 2:9.

holds all the world's sin is transformed and purified by the exceedingly great grace of God. The penalty has been doled out, the instrument of torture and death is now a sure sign of your salvation. It is finished.

There on the cross, it is finished. When that cry comes out of our Saviour's mouth how do we hear it? Is it with a sense of dread and fear? Or with joy and relief? On this day perhaps we feel all those things at once, knowing that in those Words of our Lord the Scriptures are fulfilled and the Suffering Servant has completed what He intended to accomplish. The prophet Isaiah so clearly tells of the Messiah, who will come to suffer and die: "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."³ Christ dies for us in order that we may live, in order that we may have peace, and when He says "It is finished" He announces the completion of His work, which is to bring about your salvation. There is nothing more that can be done. The hour of His suffering and death is also the hour of your salvation, which comes to you today by the means our Lord has set apart for that purpose. This is the connection we have in the here and now with this Good Friday that took place 2,000 years ago. That's why we are always going on about Word and Sacrament in the Lutheran church, for in the Word of God, in Baptism, Absolution, and Holy Communion, the benefits Christ won for you on the cross are delivered in a real and tangible way. It seems too simple, it seems like there should be something we need to do. How can God accomplish such great things with such humble means? For that matter, how could God accomplish such great things on an

³ Is 53:5.

instrument of Roman torture and death? His ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts. Today we are confronted with the prices of sin. There no fix, there is nothing you can do. So Jesus takes up the battle in your stead, and it is finished, there on the cross. That is why we gather on this most solemn of days. And so through faith we have this assurance, that the announcement “it is finished” stands for all time as the pronouncement of God’s grace, and His Words echo on for all generations to hear.

By 3:00pm that afternoon Jesus has been on the cross only about six hours. Not that long, really; sometimes crucifixions could go on for days. But it’s not the amount of time Jesus spends on the cross that atones for sin, or even the degree of pain inflicted. Rather, it’s the fact that, concentrated into this time, Christ has born all the punishment that all the sins of all history deserve. God accepts the suffering of Jesus as full atonement for sin, however long that suffering is. It is finished, this work of redemption and reconciliation and regeneration. “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us.”⁴ Through the shedding of our Redeemer’s blood we have everything that we need, for we are made right with God and restored in his sight. And now “you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”⁵ All of this is a gift from God. The loving Lord wanted to rescue the world of lost sinners, be reconciled with them, and once again live in fellowship. Reconciliation was accomplished through God’s great mercy and love when the only Son of God entered his own creation as a true human and took up humanity’s place. “In Christ God

⁴ Eph 1:7–8.

⁵ 1 Co 1:30.

was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.”⁶ It is finished so that out of this redemption and reconciliation we may become regenerated into something new and different, for “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Co 5:17). We are connected to His work in our Baptism, where we are born again, made a new creation and empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk with Christ throughout our life.

It is finished. The charges are laid aside, your sins are forgiven by grace through faith, faith in the atoning sacrifice laid before you on the cross.

And now the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

⁶ 2 Co 5:19.