

**“It Is Finished!”  
(The Seven Last Words of Jesus: The Seventh Word)**

John 19:30; Luke 24:1-12

[A sermon preached by the Rev. Stan Gockel at the First Presbyterian  
Church of Portland, Indiana on Easter Sunday, March 27, 2016]

I

**What did our Lord mean when he said, “It is finished”?**

What was finished?

His life...

his ministry...

his messianic mission?

If Peter, Andrew, James, or John had spoken those words,  
there would be no doubt as to the meaning.

For the disciples the ignominious death of Jesus on the cross was the end.

Their master’s life was over.

Their hope of a new kingdom on earth was dashed.

Their dreams were smashed to bits by every ringing blow of the hammer.

No, these words recorded for us by the writer of the Gospel according to John are  
not the disciples’ words.

They are the words of Christ himself.

So what does this Seventh Word from the cross mean?

**“It is finished.”**

**What is finished?**

## II

The first thing to say is that there is a note of **irrevocable finality** about these words.

For Jesus it was all over.

No miracle had intervened to save him.

For good or ill, his life was now completely out of his hands.

His earthly days had reached their end.

In this sense, Jesus was like all of us,  
 for the day will come when each one of us will say,  
*“It is over; it is finished.”*

When that day comes, there will be nothing more that we can do here on earth.

There will be no further opportunity to change our course,  
 to make amends,  
 to right a wrong,  
 to repair our mistakes.

This is a sobering fact of life.

There will come a day for each of us when it will all be over,  
 it will be finished.

Do you remember that scene at the end of Thornton Wilder’s play, *Our Town*?—  
 when Emily, who died in childbirth, is allowed to return to Grover’s Corners  
 to relive her 12<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Emily goes back to be with her family,  
 but the experience is far from satisfying.

Everyone—her brothers and sisters,  
 and even her mother and father—  
 are so preoccupied with the busyness and the routine of life  
 that they fail to stop long enough to really take in what life has to offer.

At one point Emily pleads with her mother—

*“Oh, Mamma, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me....  
Just for a moment now we’re all together—Mama, just for a moment we’re  
happy. Let’s look at one another!”*

At last Emily asks to be taken back up the hill to her grave,  
but before going she turns to say goodbye:

*“Goodbye! Goodbye, world! Goodbye, Grover’s Corners!—  
Mama and Papa! Goodbye to clocks ticking!...and Mama’s sunflowers—  
and food and coffee—and new-ironed dresses and hot baths—and sleeping  
and waking up!—Oh earth, you’re too wonderful for anyone to realize you!”*

And then Emily turns to the stage manager and through her tears she asks:

*“Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every  
minute?”*

*“No,”* he answers. *“Saints and poets maybe—they do some.”*

Is that why we find it hard to face the finality of life’s end—  
we haven’t made the most of it?

It is God’s gift to us,  
yet we so easily let it slip through our fingers.

### III

**But not so with Christ.**

Not only had he accepted the fact that his life was over,  
but he could also say that his life’s work was complete.

It was finished!

He had fulfilled his mission.

The Seventh Word from the cross declares **the complete fulfillment of what  
Christ came to do.**

Though his life was only 33 short years,  
he did not die pleading for more time or opportunity,  
or bemoaning the things he had left undone,  
or lamenting his failures and frustrations.

Christ died knowing that he had fulfilled the purpose of his life.

He had completed the work God sent him to do.

And what was that work?

In John 4:34, Jesus had said,

*“My food is to do the will of the One who sent me, and to accomplish (i.e., finish) God’s work.”*

And in John 13:1, as Jesus and his disciples gathered in the Upper Room, we read these words:

*“Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end (i.e., the finish).”*

What is the work Jesus came to finish?

These two tasks:

- to do the will of God;
- and to love sinful people into God’s kingdom.

What, then, is finished on the cross?

In John 10:17-18 Jesus says:

*“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”*

This is how Jesus showed his love to the finish—he gave his life.

No one took his life; Jesus gave it.

The disciples did not understand this.

They saw the cross as the action of sinful humanity taking the life of the sinless One.

Later they would realize that the cross is the act of God—  
the Son of God **giving** his life for you and me.

As John would later write:

**God so loved the world that he gave his only son....”**

To understand the words, “It is finished,” we have to understand this difference between giving and taking.

A young man returned home from the war,  
an empty sleeve hanging where his arm had been.

A well-meaning friend remarked, “We are so sorry you lost your arm.”

The young soldier replied, “*I didn’t lose it; I gave it.*”

Jesus gave his life for you and me.

He was, as Pilate insisted, the King of the Jews.

That kingship is not defeated by crucifixion;  
rather, crucifixion is the way this King rules.

Crucifixion is kingdom come.

At the cross the powers of this world are forever subverted.

Time is now redeemed through the raising up of Jesus on the cross.

A new age has begun...  
the kingdom is here born...  
a new regime of peace, justice, and righteousness is now inaugurated,

creating a new way of life for those who follow Jesus.

And when his mission was complete,  
 when he had mounted his last pulpit,  
 he was able to proclaim,  
**It is finished!**

#### IV

Not only is there a note of finality in these words,  
 and a declaration of the complete fulfillment of all that Jesus came to do,  
 but this final word from the cross is **a shout of victory.**

Some have heard in this statement the cry of a disillusioned and defeated prophet,  
 as if Jesus is indicating a sense of relief that finally his suffering is over.

But the Greek word used here does not signify defeat;  
 rather, it is the shout of victory in an athletic contest  
 or when one army was victorious over another.

These are the words of the marathon runner crossing the finish line,  
 or the hockey player whose goal wins the game in overtime.

This is the jubilation of the basketball player whose buzzer-beating shot wins the  
 NCAA championship.

Jesus cried out, "It is finished," as you or I would in our moments of greatest  
 triumph and accomplishment.

The One who drinks sour wine as he dies is the very One who said,  
*"I am the vine"*—the source of all true fruit and life.

The One who is starving on the cross is the One who said,  
*"I am the bread of life; the one who comes to me shall not hunger."*

The man on the cross who is dying of thirst is the One who said,  
*"Whoever drinks of the water that I will give will never thirst again."*

The One who is about to enter the citadel of death is the One who said,  
*"I am the resurrection and the life...  
 whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."*

When Jesus cried, **“IT IS FINISHED,”**  
 all this was accomplished—  
 all this and more.

The work of Christ is finished,  
 perfected,  
 accomplished.

There is no aspect of the Christian faith more difficult for us to believe.

It is our human nature to think that Christ’s work could not possibly be finished,  
 that we have to do more,  
 we have to add to it,  
 we have to somehow earn it.

The ending of the movie *Saving Private Ryan* is a good illustration of this.

Captain Miller, in his dying breathe, whispers to Private Ryan,  
 “Earn this...earn it.”

The final scene shows Private Ryan, now an old man, and accompanied by his family, making a pilgrimage to the grave of the man who died saving him.

Before that white, cross-shaped grave marker, Ryan says,

*Every day I think about what you said to me that day on the bridge. I tried to live my life the best that I could. I hope that was enough. I hope that, at least in your eyes, I've earned what all of you have done for me.*

He says to his wife, “Tell me I’ve lived a good life...tell me I’m a good man.”

She says, “You are.”

But the point that director Steven Spielberg misses is this:

**Who could ever live a good enough life to be worthy of such sacrifice?**

Jesus said, *“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”*



But she could not just walk away.

So she clumsily shuffled over to his bedside, and she simply said,

"I am the hospital teacher and your teacher sent me to help you with your nouns and adverbs."

The next morning a nurse from the burn unit asked her,

"What did you do to that boy?"

The teacher began to apologize profusely, but before she could finish, the nurse interrupted her:

"You don't understand. We have been really worried about him...his condition has been deteriorating over the past few days, because he had completely given up hope. But ever since you were here with him yesterday, his whole attitude has changed and he is fighting back, and responding to treatment. It's as though he decided to live!"

When the nurse later questioned him about it, the boy said,

"I figured I was doomed...  
that I was going to die...  
until I saw that teacher."

And as a tear began to run down his face, he said:

"But when I saw her, I realized that they wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dead boy...would they?"

## VI

On Good Friday those who followed Jesus thought it was the end—  
Jesus was dead and everything they had worked for was doomed.

### **But God was not yet finished!**

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground,*

*but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?  
He is not here, but has risen. (Luke 24:1-5)*

Friends, something happened in that span of time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

God acted to bring life out of death.

We will never be able to explain exactly how it happened.

But we do know that something did happen.

God raised Jesus from the dead.

That is what the church proclaims on Easter Sunday.

And God continues to touch the lives of people like you and me and a young boy in a hospital burn unit.

On the cross, Jesus shows us what love looks like.

In his death and resurrection Jesus identifies with our pain,  
our suffering,  
and our human mortality;  
and in his resurrection he proves that he has overcome each of these.

Jesus died in order to redeem, save, and draw humanity unto himself.

This was the “it” that was “finished” as he shouted his dying word.

There are times in life when we feel that it isn’t finished,  
that our dreams are ending—  
but God has other dreams for us.

There are times when things have not worked out—  
but God has other workings in mind.

There are times when we feel that hope is dead—  
but God is the source of all hope.

The fourteenth century mystic Julian of Norwich wrote,

*“All shall be well,  
all shall be well,  
and all manner of things shall be well.”*

A contemporary version puts it this way:

*All will be well in the end.  
And if all is not well,  
it is not the end.*

The God who raised Jesus from the dead is involved in your life and mine...  
to finish the good work that God began within us.

And God is involved in the life of this world...  
to bring forgiveness where there is sin,  
faith where there is unbelief,  
love where there is selfishness and fear,  
peace where there is turmoil,  
hope where there is despair,

If Jesus had not said, **“It is finished,”**  
none of these things would have been possible.

If Jesus had not said, **“It is finished,”**  
all those other words from the cross would have been meaningless.

Because Jesus did say, **“It is finished,”**  
the dead can be brought back to life.

## VII

So here is my invitation to you on this Easter Sunday—  
Place your trust—  
your full trust—  
in our living Lord.

Open your heart to his love and grace,  
for when you do,  
your life will never be the same again.

**It is finished!**

**The Lord is risen!**

**Alleluia!**

**Amen!**

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