

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, our redeemer, in our weakness we have failed to be your messengers of forgiveness and hope in the world. Renew us by your Holy Spirit, that we may follow your commands and proclaim your reign of love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

SCRIPTURE READING.....John 19:28-30, KJV

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. <sup>29</sup>Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. <sup>30</sup>When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus is referring to his death, we find the active sense of the verb:

It is a distinctive feature of St. John's Gospel that Jesus remains calm and regal throughout his sufferings. There is no Gethsemane scene in St. John — no agony of spirit as Jesus prays that he might be spared the cup of suffering soon upon him. There is no cry of dereliction in John — no desperate cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Instead, in John's Gospel we have him calmly entrust his mother to John and John to his mother, he speaks words of scripture, "I thirst," and receives the vinegary wine, and then these final triumphant words, "It is finished."

I lay down my life for the sheep.(John 10:15, KJV)

And then, lest we miss the sovereignty of Jesus in the matter, Jesus spells out that he is not some helpless victim of corrupt power, but master of his own life:

Even the sequence of these last events suggests calm and confidence. The normal sequence in the horror of crucifixion is that the dying person has his head upward, straining for air as his internal organs are collapsing. Then the person dies and the head falls down onto the chest. But in John's version of the final moments for our Lord, the sequence goes the other way around: Jesus speaks his words of completion — It is finished — then he bows his head (his head does not fall, but he "bows" it) and then he "gives up the ghost."

<sup>17</sup>Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. <sup>18</sup>No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again...(John 10:17-18, KJV)

And that verb there — gave up his spirit — has a tone of self-mastery about it. It is not that Jesus "lost" his spirit, or it was "ripped away from him," but that he "gave" it up. This accords with the royal tone of Jesus back in John 10 — the Good Shepherd discourse. There too when

None of this is to suggest that Jesus did not suffer on the cross. Indeed he did, for he was "fully man," and human beings certainly suffer on the cross. But John's Gospel does remind us that in the man Jesus of Nazareth, we are also dealing with God. And when God sets out to save us, he is entirely willing and able to save.

Let me suggest four meanings for these final words, "It is finished." The fine old commentator Matthew Henry distinguishes eight different meaning for the phrase, but I want to settle for just four for tonight.

First, when Jesus says "It is finished," he means that his Passion is done. It was a bitter

path that Jesus had trod, from his arrest in the garden to this moment when he yields up his spirit to his Father. Bitter and hard it surely was, yet now it is done. That great burst of suffering is done.

I said earlier that in St. John's Gospel we have no Gethsemane scene, where Jesus was in an agony of spirit, with great drops of sweat falling from him, and with the earnest prayer, "Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me." So, there is no prayer that the cup should pass from him. Still, in John's Gospel, there is mention of the cup. It happens in the garden when the fisherman suddenly turns a soldier and begins swinging his sword. I am speaking of Peter:

<sup>10</sup>Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. <sup>11</sup>Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?(John 18:10-11, KJV)

Yes, indeed. Jesus shall drink it, and now with this Sixth Word from the Cross, Jesus declares that he has drunk it completely. His passion is "finished."

St. Paul teaches us that our Lord's drinking of the cup is finished forever. It is not as if Good Friday is but one bout of suffering among others to be endured by Jesus. No, it is the finishing of his cup. The great crisis is now behind Jesus, not facing him, not to be endured again, but already finished, completed. Paul puts the matter this way:

Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.(Romans 6:9, KJV)

Sin, death, and the devil had their chance to break Jesus. They had their most bitter chance there on the cross. But they failed. The cup is finished! Henceforth, Jesus suffers, yes, but not in the way of the cross. He suffers in sympathy and identification with *your* suffering, such that

when you are hungry, he is hungry, and when you are in prison, he is in prison. But this is part of his way of love. It is his self-chosen manner of life. No more shall his enemies and your enemies lay their hands on him and nail him to a tree. Our Lord is triumphant. The cup is finished!

The second sense in which Jesus could truthfully say, It is finished, is that as he lay dying, his ministry of salvation was thereby finished, completed, and perfected.

Back at the start of things, when John the Baptist first raised his eyes and noticed Jesus coming toward him, John put into beautiful words the ministry of our Lord:

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.(John 1:29, KJV)

For this purpose, Jesus came: to take away the sin of the world. Now, on the cross as he dies, he is able to say, It is finished, as if saying, "My ministry is done. I have accomplished that for which I came."

In St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus gives a striking insight to his sense of mission. It goes like this:

I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!(Luke 12:50, RSV)

Praise God, on the cross, Jesus is able to say, It is finished. My work is accomplished.

I remember a nice sacristy conversation with Pastor Lotz when he told me that he was thinking of retiring from his long ministry at Union Seminary here in town. Pastor Lotz was able to say that he had labored long in the field in the heat of the day and was now looking forward to retirement. So it is with Jesus on the cross. He is able to say "I have run my race, I have finished my course. It is finished." Do you hear the tone of triumph in this?

There is another sense in which Jesus could well say, It is finished: Jesus could well be saying that, at long last, a perfectly obedient life had been lived. From Adam to you and me, there has never been such a good human life. All we like sheep have gone astray, yet in Jesus there was no

sin. The letter to the Hebrews puts the matter this way:

For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15, RSV)

Therefore, we know what to expect from our risen Jesus. His story has been written all the way to the end, with no sudden swerving at the end which reveals a new and worrisome side to the man. Even about ourselves, we do not know the whole story, and therefore we do not know the fullness of who we are. I could well pray, for example, that I will not turn to a life of crime in the end, but there will be no knowing till the end come. But with Jesus, the end has come. In him there is no shadow or variability. Having begun in love, he ended that way too. That is why the resurrection of Jesus is perfectly good news. My resurrection would not be perfectly good news, especially if I am in a bad mood, but the resurrection of Jesus is thoroughly good news. It is finished. At last, a true human being has lived, and now he lives forever.

And that brings me to the last, glorious sense of “It is finished!” I mean the devil’s tyranny over you and me. I mean the dreadful thought that in the end, we are bound to be lost. No such thing anymore. Sin, death, and the devil — their grip on humanity is finished. There lies ahead of you now a path of life, a path of success, a path of fulfillment. Go ahead and seek it, knowing that this same Jesus lives and reigns forevermore, and desires to walk that path with you. All the fierce boasts that would put you down — all the harsh words of supervisors or the hurtful words of loved ones — all that which opposes you and discourages you is outweighed by the resurrection of this One who has finished his course, proved his loved, and to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.