

## It Is Finished

(Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, March 24, 2010)

John 17:1-8 (TEV) <sup>1</sup>After Jesus finished saying this, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your Son, so that the Son may give glory to you. <sup>2</sup>For you gave him authority over all people, so that he might give eternal life to all those you gave him. <sup>3</sup>And eternal life means to know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, whom you sent. <sup>4</sup>I have shown your glory on earth; I have finished the work you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>Father! Give me glory in your presence now, the same glory I had with you before the world was made.

<sup>6</sup>“I have made you known to those you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me. They have obeyed your word, <sup>7</sup>and now they know that everything you gave me comes from you. <sup>8</sup>I gave them the message that you gave me, and they received it; they know that it is true that I came from you, and they believe that you sent me.

John 19:28-30. <sup>28</sup>After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” <sup>29</sup>A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. <sup>30</sup>When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

In verse 28 we heard that Jesus knew that all was now finished, and in verse 30 we hear that he said from the cross, “It is finished.” But what does this mean? What was finished? John didn’t end his Gospel with these words, so he wasn’t finished, his telling of the Good News doesn’t end there. We are not even ending our series on the seven last words of Christ with these words, “It is finished.” As I said at the beginning of the service, next week we will consider the last words spoken by Jesus according to Luke’s Gospel, “Into your hands...” But even more important, we know that Jesus’ life was not finished. We know that God brought him back to life. There is more to the story of Jesus than this ending on a cross, or even in a grave. Jesus appeared to his disciples, to many others, and even now, Jesus is very much alive and present through those who seek to follow in his ways. Some have suggested that it was prophesy that was finished. All that had been prophesied in the Old Testament, all that had been promised by God, was now fulfilled, to use the words from verse 28 of our reading. Could that be it - prophesy is now fulfilled, finished? The promise to Abraham has been kept – or is there more? Certainly there are more verses to the Gospel of John – and Luke and Matthew. And there is more to the New Testament, and to the church – and even to the world. Nearly 2,000 years have passed since Jesus said, “It is finished.” So what is finished?

To understand what is finished, maybe we need to go back to the beginning. Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1, says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This, the Bible tells us plainly and clearly, is how it all started. This is where the story has its beginning: “In the beginning, God ...” And at the end? Still God! In the sixth word from the cross, our Savior, who had been there in the BEGINNING, remember those words in the Nicene Creed “by whom all things were made,” speaks of the end, saying, “It is finished.”

If we take this long view, then when Jesus said, “It is finished” it does not refer to the end of the agony which had its beginning with the driving of the nails, nor with the end of the agony which began with a crown of thorns and bitter mockery, nor with the end of the public agony of unfair trials before biased judges and an angry audience, nor with betrayal and denial and forsaking by the disciples, even the most trusted, nor even where we usually begin it, with the bitter lonely prayers of our Lord Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, and not even with the humiliation of a God who wrapped himself in human flesh and lay helpless in a manger because there was no room in the inn. “It is finished” marks the end of an agony for God that goes all the way back to the beginning.

God had created all things, and all things were good.

And God created human kind, but then the agony began when God came into the garden and called out,

“Adam, where are you?”

And Adam replied, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked;

...and I hid myself.”

Ever since, we might add, human beings have been hiding themselves from God:

Hiding from an ignorance of the unknown: as Adam said, "I heard the sound of you."

Hiding from personal weakness and irresponsibility: as Adam said "I was afraid."

Hiding behind a facade of bravado: as Adam said, "I hid myself."

Or behind hollow intellectualizing and rationalizing: as Adam said, "I was naked."

Or behind others: as Adam said, "The woman..."

Or behind any flimsy excuse: as Adam said, "The woman whom you gave me."

But guilty, nevertheless, as Adam confessed: "She gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate."

That was the beginning, a beginning repeated over and over again in the life of every child of Adam. But here at Calvary it has come to an end: "It is finished!" All that God had planned for human beings from the beginning when he looked at all that he had made and said, "It is very good." All that God still planned for the man and the woman hiding in the bushes after it wasn't so good any more. All that God had promised, predicted, prefigured, foreshadowed, foretold, encouraged, and urged. All that God had thought and dreamed and planned, in the long centuries of Old Testament history. Everything that God began for humanity in the beginning finds its end at Calvary: "It is finished!"

And now, we do not need to hide from God no longer. As it says in Isaiah 53:5, "He was wounded for our transgressions." By his holy sacrifice, the punishment we deserve has been meted out and received. By his holy sacrifice, the death we should die has already been died. By his holy sacrifice, the damnation we should have felt has already been experienced. These can be powerful words in our lives. Try on this sixth word from the cross and see how well it fits in your life. This is God's word that will bring an end to whatever bad beginning we may have made in life.

Are you afraid? Is there something in your life that fills your heart with dread whenever you think about it?

"It is finished!"

Are you helpless? Do you feel like there are evil powers that are draining you and taking your life away?

"It is finished!"

Are you confused? Do you feel like your life has no direction or that you have lost purpose?

"It is finished!"

Are you burdened?

"It is finished!"

Are you guilty?

"It is finished!"

Are you hiding?

"It is finished!"

Are you running?

"It is finished!"

Are you dying?

"It is finished!"

This is the ending we so sorely need, the one that brings the entire plan of God to its conclusion. "In the beginning God..." That is the right place to begin, with God.

And at the end? God; the cross of Christ. It's the only ending that really fits any of our troublesome beginnings. Every bad thing we have started and that we now contend with is over: "It is finished!" Amen.