

10/04/2020 John 18:1-19-42 Good Friday

In the second verse of the hymn Rock of Ages we hear these words:

Not the labours of my hands, can fulfill the law's demands. Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears for ever flow, all for sin could not atone: Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Good Friday is *the day* on which we celebrate the work that Jesus has done for us

The work that Jesus has completed for us, that work that he has *finished* for us

We take our eyes off ourselves

Off our empty attempts to hide our shame

Off our shameful attempts to shift our guilt

Off our guilty attempts to compare ourselves against the sins of other people

We lift our eyes to the cross

Where we see Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world

As Jesus is lifted on the cross we are drawn to him in faith

We are drawn to one another in love

And we receive the gift of eternal life

Today I proclaim to you the Good News that Jesus has finished

What he took on human flesh to accomplish

He has finished his work for you

So that you may rest in him

So that you may rest in him even in death

And be called from death into life with him

Listen again to these climactic words from today's Gospel reading:

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' 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. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

We hear in this the repeated use of the word 'finished', and the picture of completion

All was now finished...

In order that the Scripture might be fulfilled...

And those last words of our Lord

It is finished

To understand what it is that Jesus completed on the cross

We need to go back to the beginning of the Gospel

To words that we heard at the beginning of Lent

So listen to the Gospel of the Lord as it is written in John chapter 3. Jesus said,

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

These words are part of a discussion that Jesus has with the pharisee Nicodemus
The same Nicodemus who will, along with Joseph of Arimathea
Reverently prepare Jesus body for burial
Jesus proclaims that he has come to be *lifted up*
And that in being lifted up he will become the path of salvation
To those who believe in him
God's word proclaims that Jesus' being lifted up
Will reveal the love that God has for the world
That it will reveal that God does not desire the condemnation of the world
But the salvation of the world through the Son

Let's pause here

Because we are human beings – sons of Adam, daughters of Eve
We naturally run from God, and hide from God
We naturally try to cover our shame, and to shift our guilt
If we think of approaching God in our need
Then we naturally think about what we have to do
In order to appease God
What we must accomplish, what we must fulfill
What we must finish if God is to accept us and show us goodness
But already the Gospel makes clear
That God does not keep his distance from us
That he does not fear being contaminated by us
That he does not fear bearing our guilt, or incurring our debt
The Son of Man came not to condemn, but to save
His being lifted up is the means of our salvation

But what does it mean for our Lord to be lifted up?

When we read further in John's Gospel we hear these words

That Jesus speaks as he is about to enter into his suffering and death:

Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Jesus' being lifted up

Is a way of talking about the kind of death that he died

Jesus died by being lifted up on a cross

By being exposed in weakness, in nakedness and shame

In humiliation and suffering

It is Jesus being lifted up on the cross that is that judgement of this world

That drives out the ruler of the world

That draws all people to himself

Again, let's pause here: It is in Jesus' suffering and death that the word is judged

We might think that human sin is not of great significance

In the vastness of the created order

But Jesus being lifted up on the cross
Reveals to us the deep and devastating reality of sin
Jesus' death on the cross: this is what it took for God
To finish the work of undoing the power and curse of sin

It is in the suffering and death of Christ that the ruler of this world is driven out
That the devil loses any claim on the souls of human beings
The devil may use the law to accuse us
May attack us in conscience
Suggesting with subtlety and insinuation
That we are unworthy of God
But his accusations have no force
He is driven from the divine court
Because there is one who speaks up for us
The one who was lifted on the cross: Jesus Christ
He speaks not for our condemnation
But for our salvation

It is in the suffering and death of Christ that we are drawn to him
That we see that God is love
That our Lord Jesus is willing to be with us
In our sorrow, our loneliness, our disappointments
In our guilt, our shame, and our despair
We do not need to hide from our God
But can come into his light
Knowing that he covers our shame
That he pays our debt
That he forgives our sin
That he is love

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.

He loved them to the completion, to the finish

Let's listen again to those climactic words from today's Gospel: **After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' 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. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.**

Jesus has completed his work for you
He has finished what he came to start
So I say with John the Baptist:
Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world
See in him the promise of sins forgiven
And the hope of eternal life
The one who has been lifted up for you

Lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit
To bring you life and salvation

In J S Bach's setting of St John's passion
There is an aria that serves as a reflection on the words
We have been meditating on today
Listen to these words
That are a part of our heritage as God's people
In the Lutheran tradition
And let them serve you in your devotion:

*My beloved Saviour, let me ask you,
since you have now been nailed to the cross
and you yourself have said, 'It is finished':
Have I been set free from death?
Through your pain and death can I
inherit the kingdom of heaven?
Is this the redemption of the whole world?
You can indeed not speak for anguish;
but you bow your head
and silently say : yes!
Jesus, you were dead,
and now live for ever,
in my final agony of death
may I turn nowhere else
but to you, who have redeemed me,
O my dear Lord,
give me only what you have won,
for more I could not wish!*

May we turn to no one else
But to our dear Lord
He alone can save
And in being lifted up has drawn us to himself
So that we may be where he is
In the communion of the Father and the Holy Spirit
With angels, archangels, and the whole company of heaven. Amen.