

McCabe United Methodist Church
Final Words (Part 5): “It Is Finished”
John 19:28-30a * Luke 23:44-47: March 23, 2013
Pastor Rick Fossum

A seminary student was taking a test. It was an oral test about the history of his denomination and it was critical for him to pass. If he didn't pass it, he might not be ordained. The professor giving the oral test started off by asking him questions about the history of the Old Testament. The student didn't do very well. The professor asked him about the history of the New Testament. The student didn't do very well. The professor asked him about the history of the church. The student didn't do very well. At this point, the professor started feeling sorry for the student. He started asking him simple questions about history . . . history he should have learned in Sunday School and confirmation. **“So,” he asked, “What are the seven last words Jesus spoke on the cross?”** The student fumbled and stumbled around. He couldn't think of any last words from Jesus or anyone else. All he could think was, **“I'm finished. My career is over.”** That's when it hit him. He did remember something Jesus said. He looked at the professor with a smile on his face and he said, **“I do know one thing. The last thing Jesus said was ‘It is finished’.”**

Because of that last answer, he was ordained.

“It is finished.” What did Jesus mean when he said, **“It is finished?”** Was he talking about his life as in **“it's all over now? I'm dead.”** Or, was he talking about something else? Something more?

For example, Michelangelo might have said **“It is finished”** when he put the last touch on the Sistine Chapel. Can you imagine him stepping back and admiring his work and saying, **“It's done. My mission is finished.”**

Or, Don Larson, former pitcher of the New York Yankees, might have said in 1956 **“It is finished”** when he pitched the last ball of the last inning for the only perfect game in World Series history.

So, what did Jesus mean when he said, **“It is finished?”**

This is the fifth and last message in our series called *“Final Words”* or *“Final Statements.”* We hope it's been meaningful.

To help us answer the question, **“What did Jesus mean when he said, ‘it is finished’,”** let's listen to someone who was there that Good Friday almost 2,000 years ago. He was the Roman Centurion.

“I had a hard job. It was my responsibility to carry out the crucifixion orders. I didn’t personally execute the victims. I had men under me for that. But, I was responsible for making sure victims died when they were supposed to die.

“Like I said, I had a hard job. I gave the orders to flog the prisoners. I gave the orders to beat the prisoners. I gave the orders to march the victims to the top of Calvary. I gave the orders to drive the spikes into the prisoner’s hands and feet. I gave the orders to raise the crosses. I gave the orders to take the bodies down.

“I had grown immune to the blood and gore of my job. It didn’t bother me one bit to hear grown men crying out in pain. I had a job to do and I did my job well. And at the end of the day, I could put it all behind me and go home to my own family and be a father to my children and a husband to my wife. It had to be like that. I couldn’t allow myself to have any sympathy for those we crucified. Can you imagine what would have happened to me if I had felt sorry for those we nailed to the cross? No, I had a job to do and I did it.

“It was about 8:30 on a Friday morning when I ordered my men to lead Jesus and the two other criminals to Calvary. We had already flogged and beaten Jesus.

“I knew of Jesus, but not well. I was a Roman and he was a Jew. But, I had a friend stationed in Galilee and he told me how Jesus had healed his servant. He said, ‘**Jesus never even touched my servant. He said something and my servant was made well**’. My friend called it a miracle.

“I didn’t believe much in miracles especially Jewish miracles. Jews were always causing us Romans trouble. But my friend said, ‘**Jesus isn’t like other Jews. He teaches people to love their enemies; to pray for those who hated them; and to turn the other cheek instead of seeking revenge**’.

“Well, that was all fine, but a job is a job and my job was to march Jesus and the two others to the top of Calvary and crucify them. I couldn’t show any weakness. I had men under me that needed a strong leader during times like this. ‘**Drive the spikes,**’ I ordered ‘**And raise the crosses**’.

“I watched this Jesus throughout the day. I watched as my men gambled for his clothes. I watched the crowd of people as they yelled insults at Jesus and called him horrible names. I watched the religious leaders making fun of Jesus.

“Every once in a while, he would say something. I remember once he asked God to forgive us! Us! His tormentors! I couldn’t believe it. He was hanging on a cross and he asked God to forgive us, all of us!

“Another time, he told the prisoner hanging to his left, **‘Today you will be with me in paradise’**’.

“About noon something strange happened. Dark, dark clouds rolled into the land. It was like night time without the moon. I’d never seen anything like it. I thought to myself, **‘This isn’t right. What’s happening’?**

“And then I felt a small earthquake shake the ground. Some of the people ran away in fear, terrified that this might be a sign from God. I didn’t know what to think.

“Toward mid afternoon, I heard Jesus say, **‘I thirst’**. We put some sour wine on a sponge and he took it.

“It was quiet for a while. Then, about 3:00, I heard Jesus cry out. I’ll never forget what he said. He said, **‘It is finished.’** It wasn’t the cry of someone about to die. No, it was more like a cry of victory. Like a job had been done. It was like the cry of someone whose mission had been completed.

“And then he died. I stood there looking at this man called Jesus. I was scared. **‘What have I done’**, I asked myself? A strange feeling came over me. I had never felt anything like it before. It was a feeling of remorse. Sorrow. Even shame.

“I turned to my men and said, **“Surely this man was innocent. He was the Son of God’**. And for the first time in years, I wept.

“Today, I am still a Roman Centurion. I’m not in charge of crucifixions anymore. I transferred to another position shortly after that first Good Friday.

“I became a believer that day. Somehow, God had changed my heart and I realized that Jesus was the Son of God. He was everything he said he was.

“Now, whenever someone asks me the question, **‘What did Jesus mean when he said, ‘It is finished’?** This is what I tell them. First of all it means, our sins are forgiven. Jesus took your sins and my sins and he became the sacrificial lamb for all of us.

“Second, I believe that since our sins are forgiven, we’ve been given a second chance at life. A second chance to live the kind of life God wants us to live.

“And third, I believe *‘It is finished’* means we have a home waiting for us beyond this home. It’s called heaven. And Jesus is there now building you and me a mansion or a place to live once we leave this world.

“So you see, Jesus did far more that day than simply die on some cross. He finished his job. He did what God had sent him to do. His mission was completed.

“When my grandchildren ask me, ‘**Grandpa, how much do you love us**’? I say to them, ‘**I love you so much that I would die for you.**’

“This is how I remember Jesus. He stretched out his hands on the cross that Good Friday and he said to all of us, ‘**I love you this much**’. And he died. It is finished.