

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Good Friday: "It Is Finished"

Friday, April 2, 2021

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell, Senior Minister

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Welcome, Introduction to Worship Service and Prayer

Today is Good Friday. Today is the day when we are confronted again with the depth of human wickedness and the even greater depths of God's divine compassion. I pray that each of us watching today will be moved by Christ's sacrifice. I pray that we would all grow closer to God through this time of worship.

Our service today is not our usual Good Friday service. During Covid last year when we were all in lockdown, you may remember we showed the previous year's Tenebrae service. Rather than repeat that same service for you at this time, we've decided that we would offer you instead the seven last words of Christ, which are the seven last words that Christ said from the cross.

I am blessed today to be leading this service of worship with my colleagues Jerry Smith, Mark Hovermale and Ashley Ashley I'm grateful to each of them as well as to Susan Underhill for all her skill and effort in putting these video services together. We are all further blessed to have the musical vocal talent of James Moore guiding us and ministering to us throughout this service. James is certainly no stranger to our congregation. He is a dear friend who often is a part of our special music events within the life of this congregation.

Together, all of us will share with you the seven last words of Christ, but let us first begin with prayer. Would you all please pray with me.

Lord Jesus Christ, in this sacred and solemn day, when we are reminded again of the depth and mystery of your redeeming love, help us with both humility and praise to follow where you go, to stop where you stumble, to listen when you cry, to hurt as you suffer, to bow our heads in sorrow when you die, so that when you are raised to life again we may share your endless joy through the gift of your grace. Lord Jesus Christ, please hear this, our prayer. Amen.

Friends, before we turn our attention to the seven last words that Jesus offered on the cross we must first remember why Jesus was there in the first place. Jesus came to take *our* place and pay the punishment for *our* sins. The scripture tells us, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, that Christ was led to the cross without protest, without a word from his mouth.

We hear that truth communicated for us so clearly in Isaiah chapter 53 beginning at verse four and we start by turning our attention there now.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell reads Isaiah 53:4-7, the Prophecy

⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

James Moore, Guest Tenor, sings “*He Never Said a Mumblin’ Word*”

Jerry Smith, Director of Music reads Luke 23:32-34 (the First Word)

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Rev. Mark Hovermale, Pastor of Youth and Young Adults reads Mark 15:34 (the Second Word)

³⁴ And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor, reads John 19:26-27 (the Third Word)

²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” ²⁷ and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Rev. Mark Hovermale reads Luke 23:42-43 (the Fourth Word)

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Jerry Smith reads John 19:28 (the Fifth Word)

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”

Ashley S. Ashley reads John 19:29-30 (the Sixth Word)

²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Luke 23:46 Tenor James Moore sings “Into Thy Hands I Commend My Soul” (the Seventh Word)

⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Sermon: “It Is Finished”

In his recent book, “You Are Never Alone”, pastor and author Max Lucado tells the story of Kayla Montgomery, who throughout high school was an award winning distance runner. From Winston Salem, North Carolina, Kayla had set distance records, won state titles, competed in Nationals, and caught the attention of both coaches and colleges.

What was clear about Kayla is she had some remarkable natural talent. What was not clear is the fact that Kayla ran absolutely with no feeling in her legs. At the age of 15, Kayla had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis which is an autoimmune disease that impacts the nerves affecting both the brain and the spine. Heat sensitivity is one of many possible symptoms of MS. When Kayla overheats, her MS would flare up, leaving her numb from the waist down. Still, Kayla wanted to run, and she did, and she ran fast.

After the first mile marker, the numbness caused by the MS would set in and after that Kayla relied simply on momentum to keep her moving forward. Moving forward was not the problem; *stopping*, however, was. Kayla could cross the finish line, but she had no means of making herself de-accelerate. For this she depended entirely on her coach. He was a fixture at every race, shouting encouragement and prodding her to move forward, but his greatest contribution to her was catching. He caught Kayla. He would stand at the finish line waiting for her. She would run directly into his arms. She didn't slow down, and he never moved. It was no small collision that happened at the finish line! When her coach caught her, he would lift her up and carry her off the track. He would then go get her water and ice to lower her body temperature. As her temperature slowly recovered, the feelings in her legs returned.

Kayla and her coach worked together for every single race. She did the running; he did the catching. Kayla never crashed at the end of any race because her coach was always present.

Friends, we also have been blessed with a coach who is always present. Our coach is also there to catch us at the finish line. In the past year we have been reminded that our days have a limit; our breaths are numbered. No matter how well any of us run this race called life, none of us will run it forever. We're going to need some help because our skill,

strength, and determination will only get us so far. We're going to need someone to catch us at the end, at our finish line, someone who can carry us off the track and ensure our safety. And there is really only one person fit for this job, one person who became our "catcher."

On that very first Good Friday, thousands of years ago, Jesus Christ became our catcher through his life and death and resurrection. Jesus Christ meets us at the finish line of this life and carries us into eternal life. He puts an end to the sin that separates us from the holy presence of God. Through His own struggle on the cross He finished our struggle--our struggle with sin, guilt, fear, and self-doubt.

In his last words from the cross, Jesus proclaimed, "It is finished." John is actually the only one out of all four gospel writers to share Jesus' last words. The other writers tell us that Jesus died with a loud shout on His lips, but they do not tell us what that shout was. This is a shout of one crossing the finish line. It is a shout of joy, lifted by one who has completed a monumental task. "It is finished!" It is a victory shout by one who came to the end of a long, hard-fought battle.

We should be clear on this Good Friday as to what exactly Jesus is proclaiming *is finished*. For Jesus, certainly, his own struggle was finished. The suffering caused by the crucifixion was finished. But more than that, Jesus was on that cross, not because of his own sin, but because of ours. The scriptures tell us that He, who knew no sin, *became* sin so that we could become the righteousness of God. In other words God does not count our sins against us, but He counts them against Christ. Why would God do this? Because of God's great love for us, friends!

There is a song that we've sung from time to time here in the church, both in the sanctuary and the Upper Room. It's a praise song, entitled "How Deep the Father's Love For Us." The first words—the first verse and chorus—of that praise song, encapsulate so well what I'm trying to talk about:

*How deep the Father's love for us
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure*

*Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom*

There was no other way for our sins to be dealt with, except by the love and grace of God. On our own we are not capable of paying the full price of our sin, because the Bible is clear that the cost of sin is death. We could not live beyond that cost. But Christ can, so Jesus Christ, acting out of love and compassion, willingly gave Himself over to death. He willingly suffered ridicule, agony and death to ensure that the full measure of our sins would be covered through His sacrifice.

When Jesus proclaimed, "It is finished," the Greek word that is used for finished, "Tetelestai," is actually a business term. It means "paid in full." This Greek word is almost always used in dealing with financial debt and a version of this word is actually used

elsewhere in the New Testament in reference to paying our taxes. Jesus paid our debt in full. He put an end to the debt caused by our sin. In so doing, He ensured that when our lives end here on earth we will carry on with God in life eternal, life forever, because everything that has separated us from God has been cleared. Our debt has been fully paid.

Not only is the debt of our sin paid and finished. Along with our debt, our guilt, our worry, our fear, our self-doubt is also finished. It is removed by Christ, for when Christ says, "It is finished," the Bible is clear that we have received the gift of forgiveness from Christ. As we turn and believe in Christ, as we confess our sins, that forgiveness is offered freely to us. God wants nothing more than to cover us with His love and mercy, more than our hearts can hold, so we should not ever again doubt if we are loved by God. We should never again doubt if we are valued, never again should we wonder, do I matter to God, does God even know who I am? Christ came for us because we *are* valued, loved, and matter to God!

Christ did that which we could never do for ourselves. The Apostle John writes, "For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son into the world, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Friends, we know that at the end of this life there is a finish line waiting for us all. Don't be surprised on that day to find Jesus Christ is there waiting for you. He is waiting to catch you and deliver you safely home. On that last day, "It is finished" will have new meaning for every single one of us. On that final day, our words will be one with those of Christ and together we will know the joy of grace-filled victory. Thanks be to God for his saving grace.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Prayers of the People

Would you all please pray with me. Holy God, we thank you for your saving love and sustaining grace. We thank you for the gift of your Son. It is hard for us to take in the full measure of your devotion, but please help our souls to grasp this day what our minds alone cannot contain, that this was all for us. Your Son has died so we may live. Help us dare, God, to respond to your amazing act of grace with our love, faith, hope, and devotion. We are blessed, Lord, today to be finished with the curse of sin. We are blessed to be finished with all fear and worry, thinking that we do not matter to you. We are blessed, dear Lord, to be finished with a life limited by earthly constraints.

We pray today for anyone who believes themselves to be unworthy of your forgiveness. Please shower them with your grace. Help them to forgive themselves, even as you generously provide your grace to them.

We pray for anyone today who knows suffering, be it the pain of illness, the emptiness of grief, the sting of rejection. Please bring help and healing to all those who are in need throughout the world this day.

This we ask in the strong name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who has taught us when we pray to say together,

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Benediction and Blessing

Friends, as we go from here today, let us go assured of God's great love for us. Let us go in awe of Christ's sacrifice.

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be poured out upon you this day and forevermore. Amen.