

Good Friday; March 29, 2024
+ John 19:17-30 +
“Finished”

Carrying his own cross, he went out to what is called the Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him with two others, one on each side, and Jesus in the middle.

Pilate also had a notice written and fastened on the cross. It read, “Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.”

Many of the Jews read this notice, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek.

So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that ‘this man said, ‘I am the King of the Jews.’””

Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier. They also took his tunic, which was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. So they said to one another, “Let’s not tear it. Instead, let’s cast lots to see who gets it.” This was so that the Scripture might be fulfilled with says:

They divided my garments among them
and cast lots for my clothing.

So the soldiers did these things.

Jesus’ mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene were standing near the cross.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother!” And from that time this disciple took her into his own home.

After this, knowing that everything had now been finished, and to fulfill the Scripture, Jesus said, “I thirst.”

A jar full of sour wine was sitting there. So they put a sponge soaked in sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished!” Then, bowing his head, he gave up his spirit.

We must know that Jesus suffered. He suffered having to carry a heavy rough cross on his back, a back already shredded by a Roman whip designed to tear off chunks of skin. So with every step, with every shift on his shoulders, he suffered under the cross.

He suffered when they crucified him. He suffered the pain of rough nails driven through his feet and wrists, nails strategically located to stop gravity from tearing him down from the cross. He suffered not only that

immediate burst of pain, but then the slow and steady suffocation that comes from being suspended, arms outstretched, in midair.

He also suffered shame in the location of his crucifixion. Though he was not even a sinner, let alone a criminal, they crucified him between two men who were. He suffered centrally, a statement that his crimes were worst. It was a lie, a silent slander. He suffered that, too.

He suffered rejection. Crucifixion was an execution so horrific that it was not allowed inside the walls of Jerusalem; the Son of God suffered outside the capital city of his own nation, a sad and painful symbol of his rejection by his own people. He saw the religious leaders, so hardened in their rejection that they could not even stomach the governor's statement calling Jesus the King of the Jews. Just the idea, just the implication, that they could possibly wrong about Jesus, made them whine. And these were the so-called men of God. He suffered rejection by his own.

He suffered even more shame when he was stripped of his clothes by soldiers whose cruelty was not satisfied with nailing hands and feet and raising up tortured bodies, soldiers whose abuse ran all the way to stealing the clothes of a defenseless, dying man. He suffered shame.

He suffered sorrow when he looked down at his brave disciple John, the only one (as far as we know), who took the risk of standing with his Savior in the middle of murderous hate. Jesus' mother was there, and two Marys whose stubborn and fearless commitment to Jesus had them standing there, with their Savior, in his hour of greatest pain. Of course, St. John and the three Marys suffered from what they saw. But Jesus loved them all dearly. What love Jesus shows his mother and disciple by arranging their care for each other. His love for his people is always pure, always perfect. So their suffering was his, too.

And all this suffering was real. Yes, God was hanging on the cross. But when Jesus cried out with thirst, he was sending this message: I am also flesh and blood. I feel all this pain. I lay aside all glory as God in this moment and feel all this suffering fully, as one of you.

And then all his suffering ended: **When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished!" Then, bowing his head, he gave us his spirit.** It is a fool's errand to choose the most important word in the Bible. But if you had to, you could not go wrong with Jesus' statement that, in Greek, is a single word: **"It is finished."** The pastor of your sister church in Mississauga, Ontario, has that Greek word tattooed big and bold on his forearm. It must open up some doors to witness his Christian faith. Standing in line at Panera, the lady behind you sees it and asks, "What does that mean?" What does it mean – "It is finished!"?

When you and I hear "finished," our first and fastest thought might be: done; complete. A sigh or relief that a job is over with. It is true, when Jesus spoke these words, he had crossed the finish line. His work was complete. And he did more than sigh relief. He surrendered his spirit, confident of its return on Easter. But there is so much more to this finish than just completion.

So how do you know what a word means, really and fully? One way is to use a fun thing called etymology. This is not condescending, if you know what that is already, but some of us might not. It's a way of getting at a word's meaning by breaking it down into parts and analyzing them. For example, if you want to know what "biology" means you break it down: "bio" from the Greek for "life" and logy from the Greek for "word" or "study." Voila! You know what "biology" means. Etymology works...sometimes. But sometimes it leaves you with the wrong impression of what a word really means. For example: decimate. What does "decimate" mean? If you break it down etymologically, decimate means to lose ten percent. But is that

what the word means? Doesn't it mean more like "devastate" or "ruin"? The Oxford Dictionary says it does: "to kill, destroy, or remove a large portion of a thing."

Do you see what I'm getting at? If you want to know what a word means, you must look at how it's used in the time and place you seek to understand it. If we want to understand what "It is finished" fully means, we have to look at how the word was used in Jesus' world at the time he spoke it from the cross. And on the back page of this month's Forward in Christ Magazine, a pastor names Jason Zahn does an excellent job of it. He gives five ways "It is finished," was used at the time in Christ.

1. "A servant who completed an assigned task might notify his master, saying, *"Tetelestai."* I have completed what you gave me to do."

God the Father sent his Son with a mission to accomplish, and Jesus willingly made himself the servant – not only his Father's servant but yours and mine and the entire human race's. The task was to be our righteousness, to supply us with perfection from heaven, so we can enter heaven and live with a holy God. His task was to take our sins on himself and suffer for them all. And when Jesus said, "It is finished," he was telling his Father, you, me, and all the world: I have completed what you gave me do.

2. "When rendering a ruling, a judge could say, *"Tetelestai."* Justice has been served.

God is love. He is also a just judge. Fair judges don't declare justice has been done for no reason. Someone must pay the penalty for the crime. Because God is love, he did not force us to pay the penalty of hell that our sins deserved. Because he is just, Jesus had to. And the eternal Son of God paid the eternal price we owed. The cross of Christ is the at the same the most powerful proclamation of God's love and of his justice. Justice was served for our sin on the cross.

3. "A priest might say to a person offering a sacrifice, *"Tetelestai."* The sacrifice met the requirements of the laws of God.

The requirement of God's law is holiness. The requirement of his law is that anyone who is not holy receives death forever. The Lamb of God satisfied both. He meets the demand of holiness and absorbs the punishment of hell. Here is the amazing difference: normally, of course, the priest and the sacrifice were different beings. The priest was a man, the sacrifice was a lamb or bull or a dove or a basket of grain. But on the cross, the one making the sacrifice is himself the sacrifice. He is both the High Priest, who sacrifices for the sin of the world, and the Lamb of God, the sacrifice for sins.

4. When customers paid off their invoices, a merchant might stamp the bill with the word, *"Tetelestai."* The word verifies that the debt has been paid in full.

There are Christians who struggle to accept that all they have done – no matter how much, no matter how often, no matter how nasty – can be paid off by one sacrifice on a hill two millennia ago. Jesus, the Son of God, wants you to know: the debt is paid in full. In him, you have no worries, ever, about God coming after you for what you have done. Your debt is paid; now, with a thankful heart, leave the sin that Jesus paid for behind.

5. When routing an enemy, a soldier might have said, *"Tetelestai,"* announcing to an enemy, "You are finished."

“It is finished,” rings through the world and through heaven for eternity. But it’s also good to remember that it’s ringing through hell. Satan can tempt, but cannot control. He can lure, but not force. His power over those who trust in Jesus is finished. So is the power of hell; it cannot touch us. Our sin’s punishment is broken; it is finished by Jesus. And in its place comes peace with God, now and forever, as Isaiah wrote: **“The punishment that brought us peace was on him.”** Jesus has finished sin’s punishment and Satan’s power for all who believe.

Jesus suffered what we deserved. But then it was finished and remains finished. And it was more than reaching the finishing line. It was the finish of the Father’s task, the finish of divine justice, the finish of the perfect sacrifice, the finish of our debt, the finish of our enemies.

These words are proven true. Three days after he finishes our salvation, Jesus rises to prove it. Dear Jesus, our friend, our brother, our servant, our Savior, we look forward to that happy morning when we will see you again, risen so we know: It is finished.

Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus unto thee. Amen.