

“It is Finished”

John 19:30

During this Lenten Season, we are focusing our attention on Jesus’ seven words from the cross. This evening, we hear Christ speak, what for me are His most profound words from the cross (I was really pleased that I got to do this part of the sermon series, and I didn’t even have to lobby for it). John’s Gospel records the words of Jesus, “It is finished.” In the Greek, “tetelestai;” it is finished. What is finished? There are a number of correct answers to that question.

But we need to take a step back and look at the seamless connection between the Old and New Testament, how God has consistently dealt with His people, and how all of human history led up to that one moment on the cross – and all of human history since that day has looked back at that one epic event.

It is finished. What is finished? Christ’s humiliation and suffering begun at His conception is finished. The mocking, the beating, pain of nails and thorns is finished. With His death, God’s battle against Satan for us is finished. Satan himself is finished –

at least his fate and judgment is secured.

But even beyond all of that, a fundamental change occurs. The old order is finished and a new reality begins. With Jesus on the cross, we don't read of it in John's Gospel, but the other Gospel writers record extraordinary cosmic signs that the creation is becoming unglued. Darkness reigns from noon until 3:00.

Not only is this symbolic of the power of darkness which God allowed to have temporary authority over the world at Jesus' arrest and trial and crucifixion – After all, Jesus said to Pilate that even he would have no power over Him if it were not given from above. With Adam's Fall into sin, God didn't wipe them out immediately and start over (because He loves His children). So He allows darkness and evil to reign over God's goodness and light – temporarily.

And now an unearthly darkness enters creation – temporarily. Day and night are confused. Creation's bondage to sin and the curse of death, which Jesus had been absorbing into His flesh since His conception and bearing with Him publicly since His Baptism, is now completely laid upon Him to do its destructive work. All the curses of sin, all sickness, all death, all judgment is now placed upon Him.

Yet, the Creator who took on flesh and was born into His own

creation, is, at this moment of death, bringing in new and eternal life. It is finished. Behold, He is making all things new. The darkness is a sign that already now the end of the old world has come in the death of Jesus Christ. And a new and eternal day, a dawn from on high, is about to break forth and shine forever on those who are dwelling in this valley of the shadow of death.

And while there is this unusual darkness, another sign occurs that another part of the old world is finished. It was a sign that no one at the cross could witness. At the temple of the Lord, the curtain to the Holy of Holies, the most inner sanctuary of the temple where the high priest would enter once per year and offer a sacrifice (the blood of the scapegoat) for the sins of the people, that curtain was torn in two from top to bottom.

The shift in God's presence from the temple in Jerusalem to Christ's body began with the announcement of the angel Gabriel to Mary. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" – that is, He "tabernacled" among us. The Temple of His body, not the temple in Jerusalem is the place where God made His dwelling on earth. That child was to fulfill all things and be the one, final scapegoat. The presence of God with and in Jesus was publicly proclaimed at Jesus' Baptism when the heavens opened, the Father declared Him to be His Son, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him.

But it is in Christ's death, when the temple curtain is torn in two, that most clearly demonstrates that Jesus is the real temple – the place where God dwells on earth.

Christ's sacrifice on the cross marked the end of an age. The old order was finished. The new covenant in His blood had been established. The first creation was spoiled by sin and death. Those enemies have been defeated by Christ. It is finished.

It is a sorrowful season as we remember the awful suffering and death of our Lord. But there is a reason that the church calls the day on which He died "Good Friday." What happened on that day, in the darkness, was not only ultimately "good", but allows us to face the darkest fears of our life and walk through this valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil.

As St. Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone; the new has come." The old is finished, and we wait and, with all of creation, we look forward to the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Our joy and time with Christ will never be finished. Amen.