

“IT IS FINISHED”

The sixth word from the cross is so short, so matter of fact, that a person reading or hearing it might pay it no mind, certainly not suggest that it has much significance. **“It is finished.”** Next time you get out your Greek testament, look it up, and you’ll see that this sixth word from the cross is just that, a word, one word: *Tetevlestai*, from the verb *televw* – meaning “Fulfilled,” “Completed,” “Finished,” “Ended,” “Achieved,” “Done,” “Accomplished.” So what does Jesus mean? “That’s all folks, there ain’t no more”? “The show is over, go home”? In the light of the life and death of Jesus, how do we understand this one word?

The word, *tetevlestai*, does not merely announce the conclusion of an activity, but carries the sense that what is now ending is complete, has reached its goal, has done what it intended to do. So, Jesus seems to be saying something more than, “That’s all folks, there ain’t no more”. I think “Fulfilled” might be a good translation. “Completed.” “Consummated.” “Achieved.” “Accomplished.” If it were not for a misuse of the expression a few years ago, I might suggest “Mission Accomplished.” Maybe “Purpose Complete” is good.

That’s the way I hear it. The wine-soaked hyssop takes us back to the Exodus for freedom from slavery in Egypt and hyssop soaked in lamb’s blood applied to doorposts and lintels of Hebrew houses in Egypt. Jesus, called by John the Baptist “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” has done what needed to be done. He has fulfilled his mission in life. He was true to his purpose, true to God, true to humanity to free us from slavery to sin. In his death on the cross, his life and ministry have come to a purposeful and meaningful conclusion. The mission is accomplished.

How is this so? What kind of mission reaches its goal by dying on a cross? What does it mean and how can it be? To believe with all one’s heart that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, dying on a Roman cross—arrested, beaten, scourged, mocked, derided, a crown of thorns plaited and forced on his head, blood now matted in his hair, nails pounded through his wrists and feet—to believe that this dying man, crucified as a state subversive has accomplished what he set out to do is lunacy, right? What does his suffering and death accomplish for anyone?

Surely the dying words of other great men make more sense. According to Shakespeare, Julius Caesar left this life addressing one of his assassins, “Et tu Brute?”. Hamlet’s last line was typically melancholic, “To sleep, perchance to dream . . . the rest is silence.” Thomas Aquinas, a medieval scholar who wrote many tomes of theology, said, “It’s all straw.” Martin Luther, whose name, despite his wishes, designates our church body, on his death bed wrote, “We’re all beggars. That’s for sure.” Few people leave this life saying they’ve accomplished what they set out to do, but no one says, “I wish I had spent more time at work and less time with my family.” Earlier this month, April 9, we commemorated Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German theologian and pastor who resisted Hitler and the Nazis, and who when he was taken to be executed 66 years ago said, “This is the end . . . for me the beginning of life.” Yes, he expressed hope in God, but I doubt that he felt he had accomplished his life’s goals.

This dying word from Jesus is somewhat unique, especially for a young man, and all the more unique that he says this word, *tetevlestai*, from the cross, a crucified criminal. It’s not just the word but also where he says it that is so important, for the cross is crucial to Jesus’ mission which he has now accomplished.

As they say, the medium is the message. The cross and Jesus' life all the way to the cross is the message.

John 19:30

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What is the message of your life, or mine? Does it declare praise to my Creator and love for my neighbor? Is our mission in life being accomplished or have we lots of loose ends, questions, worries, wonderings? Perhaps you've had times when you feel like calling it quits, like throwing in the towel, wanting to stop the world to get off. It seems to me that for many of us there are days that end, not with everything fulfilled, but with the feeling of being too tired to do any more. We may have a taste of frustration in our mouths as we roll our bodies into bed, because we didn't get the day's agenda done.

Yet, Jesus' mission is accomplished. He had done what needed to be done. He did not regard equality with God as something to be taken advantage of, but emptied himself and humbled himself, faithful and obedient to God, even unto death on the cross. He resisted the times of trial, such as those 40 days in the wilderness and while he prayed in Gethsemane. He did not take short cuts to avoid suffering. He held firm to God and God's Word. Even in the face of conflict and controversy, in the face of threats and plots on his life, Jesus was single in purpose, pure in heart, willing to trust God. In word and deed he challenged the religious authorities and the political powers by always being true to God. He called and gathered followers whom he sent to proclaim his Way, in a kingdom of faithfulness. He readied himself and them to drink the cup of suffering and death. He drank the cup to the very bottom.

He came to serve, not to be served. Even on the cross he was taking care of details: forgiveness of his enemies, mercy to a repentant thief, taking care of his mother's well-being. Through his dying he takes on the powers of death, the powers of darkness, my darkness and the world's, and he overcomes death and darkness. Through his dying he overcomes the power of death, for through his dying God works the victory of new life. All is accomplished!

The cross of Christ is now the sign that marks my life and yours. From the time of our baptism we bear the mark of the cross. The cross shapes our lives. Receive the mark of the holy cross upon your brow and upon your breast as a token that you shall know the Lord, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering. In our daily prayers, the cross marks the beginning and the ending of each day. It marks the beginning and ending of our worship. It is the sign of Jesus' mission accomplished. Yes, the sign of his suffering and death, but also the sign of his victory. For through Christ's suffering and death is fulfilled our life and salvation. We now know that nothing in all creation can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The sign of the cross has become for us the sign of life, the sign of hope, healing and promise. It signifies our reconciliation and friendship with God and one another. It proclaims that in Christ Jesus God has gathered together all things, in heaven and on earth, and made creation one under the lordship of Jesus.

To God Alone Be Glory.

Amen.