

**SERMON 1**

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9;  
John 18:1-19:42**

“It is finished.”

Many said words like those that day. Pilate pushed himself up from the judgment bench and sighed, “Jesus is finished, another political troublemaker out of the way.”

The religious leaders looked at one another and said in hushed tones, “Jesus is finished. No more offense from him.”

The soldiers as they turned their backs and walked away: “Finished. It is over, our unpleasant but necessary work for the day.”

The crowds as they watched Jesus breathe his last and his head slump down, lifeless: “Finished. The spectacle is over.”

All comments on the moment, comments on the day, comments made by those with limited vision.

Not so with Jesus’ final word, *tetelestai*, which is Greek for “It is finished.” This is a word of cosmic import, a word of timeless importance, of universal significance. It is finished. Jesus’ last word. It’s just one word in the language of the Bible.

“It is finished” – his concluding declaration, his last word, the final punctuation on a sentence begun before the beginning. With this word of completion, finality – “finished” – we are reminded how all began: in John’s gospel:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. From his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace.”

And so Jesus’ word, word of Word incarnate, this one word, which we translate as “it is finished,” is the final punctuation on a sentence begun before all that is, before we were knit together in our mothers’ wombs, before the first light, first life, first spark, first dream, first bursting forth of creation.

The final punctuation on a sentence spoken in love, spoken across space, time, through ages, prophets, patriarchs, matriarchs, sages, and in these last days, spoken to us by a son: Jesus.

## Sermons for Good Friday Year C, March 25, 2016

The final punctuation on a sentence spoken, lived in love; spoken, sung, breathed, in words such as “And I, when I am lifted up, I will draw all to myself.” Words such as “Love one another as I have loved you.” Love, spoken in actions: touched and touching, taught and teaching, love reaching out, healing, embracing, lifting; calling “beloved” those called wrong, weak, small, outcast, other, sinner.

The Word incarnate spoke love in words, in deeds, spoke love in handing himself over, giving himself up, pouring himself out, until there is nothing left, nothing more needed, just one last breath, one last word. God’s sentence of love spoken across time, space, boundaries, on the cross – spoke its final syllables, in gasps, in an agonized whisper, in pain, yes, but with precision, point and power. This is no giving up, this is declaration: “It is finished.” Period.

Jesus’ word brings forth our words of prayer:

O Jesus, to you, now lifted up, with your arms of love stretched out on the hard wood of the cross, in your loving and giving until all is completed, to you in your finishing, we bring all our incompleteness, all our unfinishedness, all those things done and left undone: our fractional loving, our fragmentary living, our unrealized intentions, our unfulfilled potential, our unarticulated praise, our unprayed prayers, our underachieved service, our ungiven forgiveness, our conditional charity, our inadequate hope, our wanting faith, unfinished us, unfinished me. And you say, drawing each of us and our incompleteness all to you, “It is finished.” Period.

### SERMON 2

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42**

Take up your cross, the Saviour said, if you would my disciple be.

Well, today we see what that really means. Today, we kneel to venerate the wood of the cross on which hung the Savior of the world. And we recognise that we are completely incapable of following his commandment and carrying the wooden weight of the burden he took on for our sake.

In many ways, realising that has been our entire Lenten project.

The ash crosses we marked ourselves with 40 long days ago were our white flags of surrender. Our cries of “uncle.” Our declaration that we can’t. That we know, deep down, exactly what God expects of us: to act with justice, to love kindness, to walk humbly with God. To love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. To take up our cross and to lay down our lives for our friends.

## Sermons for Good Friday Year C, March 25, 2016

But we can't. For we are but dust, and to dust we shall return. And we know that if we were fully living into our baptismal commitments, we would be up there – tortured, bleeding, hanging from a tree. Because the world does not exactly reward those who act with justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.

And so we don't. We do what's comfortable. We do what's safe. We do what's nice. We love our comfortable, safe, nice lives, and do not want to lose them – even for Christ's sake.

Recently, a group of teens were being introduced to the Book of Common Prayer in their Sunday-school class, and when they got to the section on Proper Liturgies for Special Days, one of them asked, "Why do we call it Good Friday?"

It is such a predictable question that it's easy for us to try to answer it without thinking, without listening to what is really being asked. This particular teenager wasn't just asking why we call it "Good Friday" when it is the day that Jesus died. He was asking why – if we call it Good Friday, if it is Good News that Jesus died for us on the cross – our worship, then, is so solemn, so somber, so filled with genuflections and prostrations. If, as we proclaim, it is a "Good Friday," why do we not shout joyfully and sing as the Israelites did at the shore of the Red Sea? Why do we not praise God with the trumpet, and lyre, and harp? Why, today of all days, are all our songs of glory in a minor key?

The answer lies in this truth: Today is a day for gratitude, but it is also a day of sorrow.

While we glory in Christ's cross, we also mourn the fact that our sin made his sacrifice necessary. And we sorely grieve that, as the prophet Isaiah says in our reading today:

"By a perversion of justice he was taken away. ... For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth."

Christ's death is the means of our salvation. And it is right to give God our thanks and praise, for by virtue of his cross, joy has come to the whole world.

But we also mourn that an innocent man had to suffer and die because of our actions. And we mourn that the innocent continue to suffer, because we are unwilling and incapable of making the sacrifices to our comfortable, safe, nice lives to ease their suffering.

The great preacher Otis Moss, III, once said, "They could not distinguish between the gospel shout and the blues moan." He was preaching on a passage from the

## Sermons for Good Friday Year C, March 25, 2016

Old Testament, from the third chapter of the Book of Ezra, about those returning from exile who laid the foundation for the new Temple:

“And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people’s weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away.”

The Rev. Moss uses this text to declare to us that we have a blues-note gospel – a gospel of great joy at the mighty power of our saving God, written in a minor key. A gospel in which our great joy at God’s power and mercy is often indistinguishable from our mourning at the need for that power and mercy; at our inability to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves – still less, as much as God loves them.

And so, on Good Friday, even as we kneel in awe before the King of the Universe, hanging on a cross for our sake, we also kneel in the sure and certain knowledge that we are not following in his footsteps on the Via Dolorosa. That we are not even denying him as we warm our hands by the fire. We are in the crowd, calling for his crucifixion.

And so our gospel shout that today is a “good” day – the best of all days – is indistinguishable from the blues moan that today is a day that is needed. A day that will still be needed, even as our praise at the empty tomb resolves the minor chords into major ones.

Good Friday reminds us that we have a blues-note gospel. That Christ’s death and resurrection may have saved us from sin and death, but we still sin and we still die. As we kneel at the foot of the cross, mourning our sin and the evil that we witness around us, we are forced to reckon with these facts – facts we would much rather forget.

As Easter dawn approaches and we ratchet up our gospel shouts and prepare to say that word we use during worship that has been buried for the last 40 days, we must not forget that our gospel shout contains those blues moans, those minor keys.

As the Rev. Moss reminds us, the blues moan is indistinguishable from the gospel shout.

Because while we mourn the necessity of Christ’s one oblation of himself once offered, we give thanks that it is a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of

## Sermons for Good Friday Year C, March 25, 2016

the whole world. And that in him, God has delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before him.

And as our gospel shouts echo through the empty tomb, may we remember the profound and never-failing mercy of God, the mercy that holds fast even when we do not – that holds fast precisely because we will not – and be thankful.

### SERMON 3

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42; Psalm 22**

*“For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”*

*Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”*

Good Friday comes every year with its unique burden of grief. We know the story, we have heard it, felt it, wept over it. But every year it comes to us with renewed regret and sorrow, even though, for the Christian, the outcome of the story does not remain in tragedy but emerges in triumph. Yet the pain of it never diminishes. When we hear the words of John, so simple and so utterly heartbreaking, we allow our hearts to be wounded anew.

What strikes the listener and participant in this drama is the injustice of it all – the actions that bring the prophecy of Isaiah to its startling reality: the one who lived in total obedience to God is being made an object of scorn. The one who loved so thoroughly and so completely is being left alone, spat upon, and rejected – a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Despite all the affliction and suffering Jesus, willingly, without resistance, “poured out himself to death”; he who was without sin “was numbered with transgressors,” as it says in Isaiah, “bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

We know that all this came to pass. Sometimes we watch, and like many passersby on the Via Dolorosa, feel only curiosity: in a violent world like ours, meeting death without responding in revenge is so odd that we cannot comprehend it. At other times we feel the terrible injustice of that Friday and are angry. But anger is not allowed: Jesus tells the angry Peter, “Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?” Something else is happening here, as alien to our world as it was to the Roman and Hebrew authorities in the first century. We still don’t comprehend this kind of total obedience to the divine will. We don’t understand what he is telling Pilate any more than that unfortunate procurator understood him.

Pilate is trying to buy time. Filled with fear of what the emperor would say if he made another serious mistake with the Jews (for Pilate had a history of bad mistakes with the religiosity of the Jews), he is trying to find a way out of this dilemma so he will not be demoted by Tiberius once again. Fascinated by this silent prisoner who has the bearing of a king because of his innate peace and authority,

## Sermons for Good Friday Year C, March 25, 2016

Pilate asks him, “Are you a king?” Jesus had spent his short years of ministry proclaiming a new kingdom, something so removed from Pilate’s understanding of power that Jesus does not really answer that question; he knows that Pilate will not understand. But he gives to Pilate, and to all of us, something much more important to think about:

“I came to testify to the truth,” he declares, and adds something so utterly surprising that if Pilate and all the people around that drama had listened, they might have died in hope, when their time came. Jesus adds, “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Can you imagine what it means to belong to the truth? It implies a state of being. Truth is no longer an abstract concept but a concrete reality. The only way for us to understand truth, as used by Jesus here, is to grasp that Truth is God. It is in the nature of God, it emanates from God, we can belong to it. When we belong to Truth, we belong to God, and we are able to hear Jesus’ voice.

What a wonderfully comforting statement this is. Not just for us who have heard the good news, who have believed in God as revealed in Jesus, but also for the whole world – for all who seek the truth, as our Book of Common Prayer says. Once again on this Good Friday we feel the universal embrace of God’s love, we hear the universal call to all whom God has created. He who poured out himself to death for us assures us on this night that all who belong to the Truth hear his voice. Instead of separating us Jesus, in his death, brings us together.

May we wait for resurrection in the same spirit of love. After weeping bitterly with Peter for all that is past, let us wait with the women at the tomb, ready to serve the one who poured out himself for us.

### SERMON 4

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16 or Hebrews 5:7-9; John 18-19**

“Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to his disciple, “Here is your mother.”

Jesus hangs on the cross. Crowds of people stand around watching the spectacle – some watching in horror, others with indifference, still others with a sense of triumph. “That annoying and dangerous prophet is in the last throes of death, thank God,” they may be thinking. There had been cries of “Crucify!” and “Give us Barabbas!” There was the disgraceful set-up of a trial – lies, sarcasm, physical and emotional abuse, and a question, “What is truth?”

Connected to Jesus all the time by the strong bonds of love and finally standing beneath the cross is the mother. It must have been an absolutely sickening sight. Human beings nailed or tied to cross-beams like animal carcasses. Blood, gore, sweat, the bodies twitching in agony – life being torn out of bodies that shouldn’t have been dying. Jesus and the two thieves weren’t sick. Jesus at least we know

## Sermons for Good Friday Year C, March 25, 2016

was still young. Human beings were deliberately ripping life out of other human beings, and for what? The other two are called “thieves.” They must have stolen something – we don’t know what. But Jesus? Jesus was only a troublemaker. Jesus dared to challenge God’s people about their lack of faith – their carelessness about living Torah. Jesus cared about the poor. He healed the sick, preached, taught, ate with the marginalized, forgave sinners. Does that deserve this kind of death? Did the thieves deserve death? Who ever deserves to have life deliberately taken away?

Mary stands at the foot of the cross. The disciple John stands with her. Can you imagine what these two are thinking? Can you imagine the crushing pain of a mother watching her son die? Die – not because he had done anything wrong, die because he loved so much. That’s the puzzlement of this whole scene. Jesus loved everyone. He paid attention even to people who tried to trick him with their unanswerable questions – or so they thought. He took them on every time, but never in a cruel or imperious way. He was always to the point, but thoughtful and kind, even when challenging. He was a teacher who had one basic lesson: love. So, for this he’s on the cross and his mother stands and watches him die. This is a terribly quiet day. It’s embarrassing to hear the crowd yell, “Crucify him!” It wouldn’t be if this were just a story in history. It’s embarrassing because today brings us face to face with our own sin, and we might wonder how we still crucify other human beings. Once again, we don’t seem to have learned the lesson Jesus worked so hard to teach. The embarrassment makes us want to blame someone else. “The Jews killed Jesus, or maybe the Romans, but certainly not me.” But saying that creates another problem. People who have bought into that thinking have reacted throughout history with things like the Inquisition, the Crusades, Nazism, and intolerance of many different types.

And so we’re quiet. Our liturgy has a sense of stillness, and yet there is movement. On Holy Thursday, we moved from the upper room, where Jesus washed the disciples’ feet before sharing the bread and wine, into the garden. Today we retell the story of the arrest, trial, suffering, and death of Jesus. We venerate the cross in word, action, and hymn. We see the mother stand beneath the cross and picture her receiving his dead body into her arms. No mother should have to see her child die. We want to turn our eyes away, but we can’t. If we don’t look at the cross and understand that Jesus is dead, his life taken cruelly and yet given freely out of love, if we don’t see ourselves in the heart of his mother willing to be there with him even if it’s dangerous, then we might not really understand the true power of the resurrection.

God gives all so that we might begin – just begin – to understand unconditional love. Once we understand, we realize we’re asked to do the same in many different and varied ways, some easier than others – some, like this death on a cross, a total gift of self for others.

“Woman, behold your son.” Then he said to his disciple, “Here is your mother.”

## **Sermons for Good Friday Year C, March 25, 2016**

We are in the hearts of both mother and disciple. We're given to each other by God to care for each other, to give support and love without reserve, to be willing to give our lives.

We leave this place in silence. We've heard our story once again. We've looked at the cross and imagined what it means to us. And now we wait.