

It is Finished

Midweek of Lent V

April 1, 2020

Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 1 of 4

Now when Jesus had received the wine, He cried out with a loud voice, “It is finished.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

The kingdom of God is like an elderly couple who made it through the depression years, they made it through World War II years, they made it through the raising their kids and making land payments and paying their bills years, and then the day came when they sent in their final land payment, and all of their debts were paid, they dished up a huge bowl of ice cream, they sat down in their easy chairs, they looked at one another, they smiled, and declared, “we did it.”

The kingdom of God is like a man and his wife not too far away who raised up four beautiful daughters, they worked hard, they traveled the road of cancer including surgeries and long hospitalizations and treatments and more long hospitalizations, the months dragged into years, and as he approached his last days here on earth, he had one item on his bucket list, he wanted ever so much to hold his first grandchild in his arms, God answered their prayers, the day came when he in fact held his precious granddaughter in his arms, this family gave thanks and praise to God, not too long after, he breathed his last, his pastors and loved ones commended him into the hands of God, it was finished

Tonight, I invite you to come one more time to the cross of your Savior. Come with every one of your wishes, your dreams, and the items on your own bucket list. Come with your failures, your faults, and your frailties. Come with your anxiety, your fears, and your trembling. Come with your feelings of wanting to give up, with every last bit of confusion, and with a thousand and one questions you might have. Questions like, “how much longer will this virus be putting our lives on hold? How many folks will need to die? Why would a good and a gracious God be permitting such suffering? Is Jesus Christ really sitting at the right hand of His Father ruling all of heaven and earth for the benefit of His Church? Is He really working everything out for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes?

Two parts to our sermon tonight, under the theme, “It is finished.” Two questions, in fact, 1) What is finished? 2) So, what if it is finished?

What is finished?

Before we get to that question, we simply acknowledge what is not finished. Foremost on our minds tonight is the coronavirus and the reality it seems to be slowly but surely on a death march into our big cities in particular and throughout the world in general. A death march that may well be culminating on the Day of Resurrection and spilling out into our hospitals and funeral homes and cemeteries throughout the seven weeks of Easter. Our

It is Finished

Midweek of Lent V

April 1, 2020

Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 2 of 4

minds are racing in wild and every which way direction. Collectively, our hearts are pounding like they have rarely pounded before. A thousand questions cross our minds day and night - how many of us will be infected? How many of us will be dying? Will the good old days ever come back to us? Is this the beginning of the end? When all of the dust of Covid 19 has settled, what will be our reality? When and if this pandemic is through sweeping its nasty path through our villages and cities, will our hearts have been changed? Will we have learned what God has been trying to teach? Will the kingdom of God be coming more and more into our world?

Back to the sixth of seven words of our Savior from the cross - the word tetelestai, one Greek word translated into our three English words, "It is finished." The simple answer, of course, to tonight's question, "What is finished? It is that the salvation of mankind has been accomplished. The cup of a righteous God's wrath has been consumed. Payment for the sins of all generation has been made. Once and for all the Old Testament sacrificial system has ended.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God promised that their Descendant would crush the devil's head. At the cross, Jesus did exactly that. God promised Abraham that his descendant would bless the nations, by suffering under Pontius Pilate and being crucified until he was dead and buried, Jesus did that.

The devil did his best to stop Jesus, but Jesus would not quit. The devil and the forces of darkness threw everything including the kitchen sink at Jesus, but they couldn't stop Him. Herod made sure all the babies of Bethlehem would be slaughtered, but this mission would not be aborted. The devil tempted Jesus in every way possible, but in every case, using the written Word of God, the Son of God resisted.

The Jews tried to stop Him when they lifted up stones to stone Him. Religious leaders meant to stop Him when they insisted on crucifixion. False witnesses lied through their teeth trying to trip him up, soldiers spit and slapped and beat the you know what out of him, but Jesus kept on going. Enemies mocked and they ridiculed and insulted, but Jesus kept on putting one foot in front of the other. One disciple betrayed, another denied three times in a matter of minutes, and others ran for their lives, but Jesus persisted. He ran the straight race none of us could ever hope to run, he fought the fight none of us could get close to fight, while we were yet in our sins, he went like a lamb to the slaughter, and when all was said and done, he cried out in a loud voice that it was finished, he commended his spirit into the hands of the Father, the curtain in the temple ripped, the earth quaked, and the bodies of departed saints were resurrected, and the centurion put into words what we all want to declare again tonight, "Surely this was the Son of God."

It is Finished

Midweek of Lent V

April 1, 2020

Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 3 of 4

Tonight, Jesus would look you in the eyes one more time and say, (and I'd like to think with a bit of a smile on his lips), mission is accomplished. Your father in heaven isn't angry with you, he took all of that anger out on Jesus. You don't have to carry around the guilt of your sins, behold the lamb of God who takes away the guilt of your sins, he takes away the power of your sins, he takes away the eternal consequences of your sins, praise be to God.

Dear friends in Christ, in the waters of Holy Baptism and in the bread and the wine of the Holy Supper and in the preaching and teaching and remembering of God's Word, all that Jesus Christ has accomplished in life and in death and in resurrection is delivered into your very soul, into your hearts, and into minds. Again and again the benefits of Word and Sacrament are given, to be received and not only to be received but to be enjoyed and not only to be enjoyed but to be treasured and not only to be treasured by to be shared and passed along to anyone at all interested in having the peace and the joy that only the one true God can provide. Which brings us to our second question.

Question #2 tonight is "So what if it is finished." (Dr. Eggold, our homiletics prof, always asked this question after we had examined, dissected, interpreted, explained, and analyzed any portion of Scripture - so what?) So what if our sins are forgiven? So what if our salvation is accomplished? So what if we know that when all the dust of earthly life settles, we have a mansion on reserve in heaven? Luther answers, that we might be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Or to say it another way, it means that we would live as the forgiven and redeemed and precious and on our way to heaven people that we are. That we would know we have been saved, and we would be glad about it in a way that would attract others to join in on the victorious Christian living.

We would admit tonight that whenever we doubt the promises or the goodness of our God, whenever we try to be saved in part by our own good efforts, whenever we pray and cry and struggle as though we are yet in our sins, we are in effect living as if it isn't finished. We know better than to try and meet Jesus half way, rather, we believe that he is the way. We are by no means saved 50% by Jesus and 50% by our own efforts, God is to get all of the glory in all the circumstances of life for calling and gathering and enlightening and sanctifying us into his family.

Dear friends, there is so much that we don't know about the days in which we are living and what the future holds. That's always been true, but tonight, as much as ever before in my 65 years and 5 months and 27 days of living, I yearn to sing those words many of us have been singing for decades in midweek Lenten services, for me starting at little Peace Lutheran

It is Finished

Midweek of Lent V

April 1, 2020

Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 4 of 4

Church in Barney, North Dakota, with an elder turning down those lights, and say them with me,

Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

The kingdom of God is like Christians scattered all over the globe tonight, many of them with their eyes fixed on smart phones and iPods and screens, big and small. On the one hand, their minds are racing with death and rumors of death worldwide, but on the other hand, they revel in the truth that Jesus Christ has come that we might have life, and not just a little bit of life once in a while, but life abundantly in every situation, with no exception. On the one hand, they are afraid, and on the other hand, they fear not, for the Lord is their shepherd, he keeps on leading them into green pastures and near the still waters. On the one hand there is so much to do, there are people to see and tasks to perform, but on the other hand, this evening, they lay their heads down on their pillows, they hear Jesus crying out with a loud cry, "it is finished," they hear him commending himself into his father's hands, and they see him bow his head and give up his spirit. They close their eyes, their minds are at peace, they are certain that God neither slumbers nor sleeps. He doesn't even press the snooze button. Amen