

“It Is Finished”

Good Friday
John 18:1-19:42

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for illumination: God of all things, send your holy spirit now. Help us to hear the words you have for us today. Now, silence in us any voice but your own. Amen.

The crowds and his disciples watch from a distance. His mother. His mother's sister and Mary Magdalene are present. Those to his right and left. The onlookers and guards. They are there, and tonight, we are too.

Arrested, whipped, humiliated, mocked, crucified – today Jesus hangs on a cross, dying slowly. It is finished. He is dead. Those who witness it are deafened by the silence.

I can't help but feel the weight of its message. Try and picture ourselves there. Imagine the scene. Count the minutes. Beg for relief. Pray for a different outcome. I wonder what it sounded like that day? Was it loud? Did the silence overpower the wind? Did the darkness stretch for miles? Seems like the dying goes on way too long. Jesus breathes out, "It is finished." One final exhale.

Interestingly, I am uneasy with the silence that remains. That silence leaves me wondering, is that all?

In this very public act of execution, we see the power of the authorities. We see the onlookers gathered. We see his friends, coming to grieve and care. We also see Jesus fully connected to

God. Ironically, Jesus does not sound like a victim, but one who takes his life into his own hands. Showing us salvation.

Author and preacher, William Willimon writes:

Here is a man who has nearly bled to death, nails through his hands, nails through his feet, hanging there, barely able to gasp, probably suffocating slowly to death. You'd think he'd be passive, spent, gone. Yet at this moment Jesus takes charge. He takes his life out of the hands of his tormentors and places it confidently in the hands of [God]. He will not let his crucifiers have the last word or determine the significance of the cross."¹

In Jesus, we see a few things about our world and about us. Jesus is a mirror on which we see the face of all that creates pain in our world.² Yet, we look away. Too gruesome to acknowledge the horrendous acts against one another. Jesus reflects the damage we do to others, individually or collectively.

Jesus is a victim who cannot be ignored. In him we see the suffering of all the lives that have been cut short or twisted or denied. Jesus breathes out, "It is finished." One final exhale. Only silence remains.

¹ William H. Willimon, Thank God It's Friday: Encountering the Seven Last Words from the Cross. Abington Press, 78-79.

² Melinda Quivik, www.workingpreacher.org April 18, 2014

Emma Gonzales, a survivor of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School turned activist for a generation, gave tribute to her classmates and teachers at last week's March for Our Lives in Washington, DC.³ Two minutes into her powerful speech she stopped. She bravely stood in silence for over four minutes. Through her tears, she made palpable the terror experienced by victims and survivors. The silence made onlookers squirm. And the television producers gasp with so much dead air. She was onstage for 6 minutes and 20 seconds. It was the same amount of time that pain and horror echoed through the halls at her school just five weeks earlier.

Her silence that day was unnerving. It's uncomfortable to stand in silence because we don't know what to do it. The power of the silence forced the crowd, these onlookers, to stand in that space to grieve seventeen lives lost too soon, all the while wondering what, if anything, would break that silence.

We too are uneasy with the silence. We are uneasy with a story that is so raw. Yet tonight, we get a long hard look at the cross. Tonight, we are up close at the foot of the cross. Eyes fixed on the cross. Seeing Jesus. Seeing the cross. Seeing ourselves.

³ Patrick Henry, <http://www.startribune.com/the-march-for-our-lives-demonstration-emma-gonzalez-s-silence-for-the-ages/477980623/>

In this long silence, we contemplate human failure, loss and sorrow, guilt and our need of forgiveness. Remembering Christ's invitation to the meal he shares. Celebrating the gift of Jesus Christ for the world. Praying for the world and hoping to somehow see ourselves more fully.

Jesus is the nearly silent one who faced accusations that are impossible to address because people have no idea what they are saying. Jesus shows us the futility in speaking the truth to those who have no desire to hear. Their personal agendas leave them without the vision needed to listen.

In Jesus, we can see the value of relationship. He is the one who loves his mother and his friends. And as he takes his last breaths, he honors them making sure they are cared for.

After drinking the sour wine from a sponge held up to this mouth as he hung there on the cross, Jesus declared, "It is finished, Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." (John 19: 30). **He** gave up his spirit--the crucifixion did not take it away from him.

The irony in John's passion is that in Jesus we see God's strength, majesty, and might revealed amid pain and humiliation. We've known for a while that Jesus will die at the hands of those he has offended. His death lacks surprise.

At the end of worship tonight we leave in silence. We hear lots of words this week, from Palm Sunday to Maundy Thursday. On Good Friday, it is finished. Only silence remains.

The death of God's own Son is a tragedy we cannot fix. We don't have the means to make all this work out. Just as we don't have the power to create a happy ending after school shootings. After the words Jesus has spoken, the deeds Jesus has done, it is now up to God to make his life and his death mean something.

We're all waiting. Watching to see what God will do. I wonder what, if anything would break that silence? Only God can break this silence.

The next move is up to God.

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