

March 29, 2024  
John 19:28-30

Good Friday  
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

## **“The Cry of Accomplishment”**

“When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

While I do not follow men’s or women’s college basketball closely during the regular season, I always find their respective NCAA Tournaments that lead to the Final Four fascinating. While there are certain teams that always seem to rise to the top, the tournament offers the possibility that a lower-ranked team can upset a team with a better record and become that year’s “Cinderella Story.” One year, a small school from my home state – Saint Peter’s from Jersey City, NJ – became the surprise of the tournament, advanced far beyond anyone’s expectations. This year, the focus is on the Women’s Tournament and a player from the University of Iowa, Caitlin Clark, who is breaking records for both male and female athletes and is becoming one of the greatest sports stories of the year. No matter what story may be the focus of any year’s tournament, both the men’s and women’s contests end when one team wins the championship game. After a long season and an arduous tournament, both the victorious men’s and women’s teams will raise their championship trophies to celebrate the accomplishment of their goal from the beginning of the season: to cry out in voices of victory that all that had strived for has been accomplished.

It is by coincidence that the excitement of these tournaments is happening at the same time that Christians are gathering in Holy Week to remember our Lord’s final days with his disciples: his Last Supper and institution of Holy Communion, his betrayal and arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, his trial before Pontius Pilate in which he is condemned to death, and his death on the Cross at Golgotha. While the tournament dates usually happen this time every year (one reason the tournament is nicknamed “March Madness”), the dates of Holy Week and Easter are governed by ancient traditions which place these most central dates on the Christian calendar a few weeks earlier this year. While they are occurring at the same time, on the surface they appear to be very different: the tournament celebrates the victory of the team that will be crowned champion, while the death of our Lord on the Cross is the most somber occasion of the year in which we mourn the death of the one whose mission appears to be as dead and buried as Jesus’ body at the end of this day.

But while no one would confuse a basketball tournament with the observance of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on this Good Friday, there is one aspect of this day that they both share in common. While all four Gospels have an extensive account of the Passion and Death of our Saviour, each offers different details about this day in which our Lord suffers and dies. This includes what we often refer to as the “Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross,” which are a collection of sayings that occur in different Gospels. Many communities offer three-hour services during the traditional hours of Christ’s suffering at Golgotha that focus on these Seven Words, each of which shares something significant of what our Lord experiences in his dying moments.

- “These words have powerful meaning and significance because they were the last words of Jesus that each Gospel writer decided to share. Each Gospel was written to a different audience and works to stress different parts of the story of Jesus ... These words hold meaning because they are the last words of Jesus before he died, and they show us that Jesus was consistent in his message and mission up until his very last breath. Each of these seven recording phrases speaks different truths to us believers. They also confirm who Jesus was and how his life and death fulfilled the Scriptures.” – Amanda Idleman.

On Good Friday, we traditionally read the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to John, which includes three of these Seven Last Words. John reports that as Jesus is in his dying moments, *“standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”* (John 19:25). All of the Gospels agree that it is the women who are the witnesses to the resurrection and the place where Jesus is buried; Mary his mother is the only person from the story of his birth at Christmas who is present at his death at Golgotha. Jesus looks down upon his mother *“and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her”* (19:26), who most people identify as John the son of Zebedee. Jesus speaks to both Mary his mother and his Beloved Disciple, declaring to them, *“‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to his disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”* (19:26-27). By entrusting her care to his beloved disciple, *“Jesus fulfills his duty as a devoted son, ensuring that Mary will be looked after in his absence ... It exemplifies Jesus’ teachings of love and selflessness, urging believers to emulate his example in caring for one another.”* (Idleman).

John then turns his attention to Jesus’ final moments before his death on the Cross, reporting that *“after this, when Jesus knew that all was not finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), ‘I am thirsty.’”* (19:28). Jesus’ knowledge that “all is now

finished” links Jesus’ death with the beginning of the hour of his suffering and death, when at the Last Supper John reports on Jesus’ knowledge of the arrival of his hour and its significance: “*Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*” (13:1). The verb “to finish” (*teleo*) occurs only in John’s account of Jesus’ final moments, but it is synonymous with the verb “to complete” (*teleioo*), which is used in John to describe Jesus’ mission to complete God’s work:

- “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.’” – 4:34.
- “The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.” – 5:36.
- “I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.” – 17:4.

The term “all” (*panta*) refers to everything God has given Jesus (“*The Father loves the Son and has placed all things into his hands*” – 3:35). “*Jesus is thus depicted as facing the moment of death with the knowledge that he has completed the work God has given him.*” (Gail O’Day).

The Scripture to which the Fourth Evangelist refers appears to be Psalm 69:21, which contains the same words for “sour wine” and “thirst” that are used here: “*They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.*” While all the Gospels include an offer of sour wine (“*And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.*” – Mark 15:36), only in John does Jesus take the initiative with his words, “*I am thirsty.*” In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the offer of sour wine is a mocking gesture, but there is no such mockery in John; “*Jesus remains a figure of dignity*” (O’Day). Of the four Gospels, only John reports that Jesus drank the wine offered to him on the Cross, fulfilling his words to Peter at his arrest to “*put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?*” (18:11).

With the final fulfillment of Scripture accomplished in the offer of sour wine, Jesus announces that “*it is finished.*” (19:30). While in one sense it may appear that Jesus is announcing his defeat at the moment of his death, this is not a moment of defeat of despair but a moment of confidence in the completion of God’s work in the Word. Jesus’ death on the Cross is the final expression of his love for his own and his love for God; “*Jesus offers his life in a perfect act of love and obedience to the Father and so accomplishes the work of salvation.*” (Curtis Martin and William Wright).

After announcing the accomplishment of God's Will, "*he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*" In his trial, both the religious leaders of the people and Pontius Pilate "handed over" Jesus to be crucified ("*Then he handed him over to them to be crucified*" – 19:16); but in the end, Jesus hands himself over in order to fulfill the Will of God for all people: "*No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.*" (10:18).

- "Here he reminds himself of the divine will that he had to suffer in this way. He can think of nothing else that remains to be done, for all that was written in Holy Scripture was finished. Therefore he gives himself up to God ... That is Christ's farewell, which he speaks for our sake, so that we may know the Father's heart." – Martin Luther.

John's account of the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ concludes with his report that "*Joseph of Arimathea ... asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus.*" (19:38). He is accompanied by Nicodemus, the Pharisee who "*had first come to Jesus by night*" (19:39) and had heard his teaching that "*no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above*" (3:3), a promise that Nicodemus did not yet realize had been accomplished through Christ's death on the Cross and what would happen when that Sunday morning dawned. Both Joseph and Nicodemus fulfill both the traditions of their people in giving the body of Jesus a proper and respectful burial as well as playing a role in the confession of faith of those who believe in Jesus Christ as the one who was "*crucified, died, and was buried [and] on the third day he rose again.*" (Apostles Creed). While the sun set on that Good Friday with the body of Jesus buried in the tomb, the sun would rise on that Sunday morning to a world that was completely transformed because of what Jesus accomplished for our sake in this death on the Cross and the new life that is ours because of what would happen on that Easter Sunday.

- "Christianity begins not with a big *do*, but with a big *done*. We begin our Christian life by depending not upon our own doing but upon what Christ has done. Until you realize this you are no Christian; for to say, 'I can do nothing to save myself; but by his grace God has done everything for me in Christ,' is to take the first step of faith." – Watchman Nee.

In a few days, two basketball teams will celebrate what they have accomplished in gaining the victory in their respective basketball tournaments. In these Three Days, we remember not what we have done but what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us when he cried out "*it is finished,*" so that we may join with the voices of God's

people throughout the generations who join in the words that are at the heart of our faith: *“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through out Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Amen.