

Message: The humble offering of Jesus

“It is finished,” Jesus said, before he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Perhaps these same words were said by Pilate, and by the chief priests, when Jesus breathed his last breath. Perhaps they were even said by Satan, at that moment of what he mistakenly thought to be his greatest triumph. But perhaps these same words were said by our Heavenly Father, when Jesus finished his mission and commended his Spirit to his Father in heaven.

“It is finished” can mean very different things. These same words could be said by an artist who has completed their masterpiece, or they could be said by someone who has completed their last chemotherapy treatment as they ring their bell. It is finished. These words can mean very different things.

When Jesus spoke these words, right before he bowed his head and gave up his spirit, he might have meant that his life is over, but he also might have meant that his masterpiece is complete. His mission to bring us our salvation has now been accomplished. It is finished. These words are ambiguous, and their meaning is determined by one thing: Faith.

We are here today because we believe that these words are good. They are more than good: They are unsurpassed. To us, there are no more powerful, more inspiring, more awe-filled words than those proclaimed by Jesus on the cross, right before he gave up his spirit: It is finished.

Faith decides the meaning of these words. And our faith leads us to hear in these words, not an admission of defeat, but an announcement of victory. It is finished. At last. The victory is finally won. Sin, death, and the devil have been defeated, once and for all. These simple words, heard in this way, describe what makes Christianity so different from all the other religions of the world. These words remind us that Christianity is not about what we do: It is about what Jesus did.

Good Friday is certainly an emotional, and sometimes complicated day for many of us. We are drawn into the story of Christ’s suffering and execution, and we are invited to enter that story. We approach it and experience it

through hymns and readings that have developed over the centuries. Each of us in our own way is touched, moved, and affected by it all.

We gather at a time when many of us are feeling other emotions such as anger, fear, and despair, as we watch events unfold around us in our world today. We may want to leave that harshness outside on the streets, but it still invades our thoughts, troubles our hearts, and disrupts our sleep.

We enter this service today and find ourselves encountering additional challenges. Our proclamation of the Passion story for today confronts us with one of the most profound challenges for Christian faith in the contemporary world. The deep, persistent, and sometimes ugly truths in the Gospel of John is on full display in the passion narrative—the relentless repetition of the Jewish people in the gospel’s depiction of those who were opposed to Jesus and sought his death has unfortunately had lasting consequences throughout history.

Even on this most holy day of the Christian year, we are conscious of all the ways in which Christian imagery and faith have contributed to the marginalization and oppression of others.

Given where we are today as we observe Good Friday, how might we find solace and strength in our service to help make sense of our world, our lives, and inspire the courage to persist in our efforts to be faithful Christians?

One possible answer to that question may lie in the example of Pilate. Known historically as a ruthless, even bloodthirsty tyrant, in the Gospels he is depicted as an unwilling and unwitting accomplice. John suggests Pilate knows Jesus is innocent of the charges levelled against him but seems impotent to resist the manoeuvrings and insistence of Jesus’ opponents.

As followers of Jesus, it is a personal calling to follow him. In John’s story, unlike the synoptic gospel accounts where Jesus is abandoned by his disciples on his last journey, the disciples accompany Jesus along the way. Peter still betrays Jesus, but we’re told that the beloved disciple—I’ll leave them unnamed as in the gospel, is able to go with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.

As the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world, Jesus did not respond as any other human being might have responded in this time of suffering and death. Indeed, when we consider who Jesus is, fully God and fully human, we stand in awe and wonder at his ability to undergo such suffering without responding or retaliating or even rescuing himself.

Indeed, it is remarkable that Jesus remained on the cross, despite having the immeasurable, unlimited powers of heaven at his disposal. He did not think of himself at all in that moment of suffering and death — he only thought of you, me, and every other person that ever lived and died. What he was doing in that moment was for the sake of others, not for his own sake as a human being.

At the cross, the Beloved Disciple and Jesus' mother Mary stand by watching and bearing witness, and other disciples, secret ones, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are responsible for Jesus' burial. Being present, bearing witness, these are important responsibilities. It may be that not all of us can act, and the actions we can take may seem futile. But we can pay attention, bear witness, remember so that the voices of the vulnerable and suffering are amplified.

To remember, to bear witness, to be present. As we contemplate the events of Good Friday, we see a deep and powerful paradox. On the one hand, we see the power of the Roman Empire bringing itself to bear on a lonely, humble teacher from Galilee who dared to challenge its power and might. On the other hand, we see Christ giving of himself for our lives and the life of the world. We see Christ, loving the world so much that he gives of himself, gives his life for us and in that giving shows us the power of love.

We see Christ suffering, and, in his suffering, we know he stands and suffers with all those today who are suffering. He is present in the rubble of the numerous wars active in the world, and on the streets of our cities. He is with us in our own lives, in our fears and despair.

As we ponder the events of Good Friday today may we find in Christ, in the cross, love's power to strengthen us to be present in a suffering world and to bear witness to the oppression and violence that surround us, and to

minister to those in need. May we find in the cross the love we need to carry on.

Consider for a moment all that Jesus has done for you and what it cost him to do it. Jesus told his disciples that if we are to follow him, we are to lay down our lives and pick up our own cross, whatever it might be. In the light of all of this, what are you willing to let go of so that you can follow Jesus more closely? What specific cross has Jesus asked you to carry? While you commit yourself to letting go of what he is asking you to let go of and picking up the cross he has asked you to carry, remember these words.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen