It Is Finished

John 19:16b-42

Key Verse: 19:30 “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

Recently I made a new wooden cross and put it somewhere in this building. Can you guess where I put the cross? Those who have eyes may see it. I put it on the wall outside above the entrance door. Even though we come in and go out from this house church, we do not recognize new things. In the same way we do not realize the importance of the cross of Jesus in our daily life and are not much excited by the message of the cross because we have heard it so many times through sermons, news, novels, dramas, movies, Youtube, and so on. We are not much impressed or moved by the story of Jesus’ crucifixion as if it were an old fairy tale which our grandma taught us when we were young. Some of us may oppose me, saying, “Oh Pastor Paul! I know what you’re going to say. Give me a break. I am okay.” But I dare to say that it is not too much to repeat the importance of the message of the cross and to testify to it again and again. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “*For the message of the cross is foolishness for those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*” Amen! Let us pray that God may give us new hearts and a new spirit to respond to the message of the cross today with eagerness, repentance, and zeal.

Today’s passage teaches us the process of Jesus’ crucifixion and his burial. Let us go up to the site of his execution and see how he was crucified and what happened to him and to the people around him.

First, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews (16b-27) Look at verses 16b-18. “***So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him, and with him two others---one on each side and Jesus in the middle.”*** Jesus carried his own cross and went up to the hill of Golgotha. He was a sinless Son of God, but he carried the cross for our sins. John the Baptist said about this, “*Look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”* (Jn 1:29) Earlier than that, the prophet Isaiah had prophesied this, *“Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering…*” (Is 53:4) Have you ever experienced someone helping you carry your heavy baggage when you were struggling with it all by yourself? Sometimes we can’t go one step forward because of the heavy weight of the baggage. In the same way Jesus was carrying the burden of the sins of the world while going up the hill. Jesus carried the burden of your sin and my sin when we were helpless with the heavy weight of our problems inside and out. Jesus said, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light*.” (Mt 11: 28-30) Jesus invited us to share our burdens with him. We don’t have to carry the burden of our sins all by ourselves. Come to Jesus and let him take our cross. Receive him in your heart as your Lord and Savior. Amen!

The soldiers crucified Jesus between two criminals. The two criminals might have been insurrectionists like Barabbas. The Romans crucified those who rose against them as warning against rebellion. The victims of crucifixion were hung naked to become objects of shame. Like the two other criminals, Jesus was stripped and hung on the tree naked. The sinless Son of God was hung on the tree with two other criminals. Why? Why did he have to be hung on the tree, though he was innocent? This was because of my sin, your sin, all our sins, and the sins of the world. We can’t realize the pain of crucifixion. We pretend to know it, but not really. The word ‘excruciating’ comes from “crucify.’ Imagine big nails piercing your hands and feet. We can’t bear the pain from even a paper cut on our finger. The prophet Isaiah prophesied about this, “*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities*…” (Is 53:5) On the cross Jesus took shame and pain which we have to take because of our sins.

People look okay and happy. Some pretend to be honest and to do all things right. But we are very ashamed when our lying or cheating is caught and our hypocrisy is exposed. In extreme cases some commit suicide when their sins are caught and they can’t bear them. Are you all right before God? Are you honest about not doing anything wrong before God and before your conscience? Even though you say that you are okay before others, you cannot hide from God. The Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.(Ro 3:23) There is no one righteous, not even one. (Ro 3:11) In the last day we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ and be judged according to what we have done on this earth.(2 Co 5:10) At that time, we all will be naked. I mean that we cannot hide anything before God, and everything will be exposed under the light. Come to Jesus while we are in the light. Repent and believe in Jesus who took all our shame and pain on the cross. And we’ll have peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins which comes from faith in Jesus Christ. (Ro 5:1) Isaiah 53:5 continues, “*the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed*.” Amen!

The soldiers crucified Jesus on the cross. Look at verses 19-22. “***Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH. THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”*** Pilate had a notice of the charge and fastened it to the cross. This placard on the cross was the conventional announcement of the criminal. The charge for Jesus was “The King of the Jews.” Ironically the charge for Jesus was the proclamation of the truth and the exact presentation of Jesus’ identity as the Promised Messiah. The Jews believed that the Messiah would come as the King of the Jews. The sign was written in three languages: Aramaic for the local inhabitants; Latin for the officials; Greek for the common language of the eastern Mediterranean world. This sign proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah not only for the Jews, but also for the whole world.

This sign offended the Jewish leaders. So they protested to Pilate to change the charge. But Pilate refused and said, “What I have written, I have written.” He meant, “Take it and like it.” This was Pilate’s psychological revenge on the Jewish leaders who had forced him to make the decision. Whether it was the charge against Jesus, or Pilate’s intentional revenge on the Jewish leaders, the sign on the cross proclaimed to every corner of the world that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and that he died for the sins of the world.

There were several supporting actors, like the Roman soldiers and weeping women, in the movie “the Passion of Christ”. Verses 23-24 describe the soldier’s cruelty and ignorance in comparison to Jesus’ humility and endurance. They took Jesus’ clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This execution squad mainly consisted of 4 soldiers under a centurion. Usually the clothing of a crucified man became the property of the executioners. The first four parts of Jesus’ clothing were easily divided among them, but one remaining garment would be of no value if cut into four parts. So they cast lots to take the whole piece of cloth. The soldiers’ behavior was cruel, senseless, and heartless beneath the painful cross. But John the author saw this as the fulfillment of the Scripture, especially Psalm 22:18. Look at verse 24b. ***“…This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, “They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” So this is what the soldiers did.***”

Near the cross there was another group who were watching the crucifixion of Jesus. They were weeping women including the mother of Jesus, Mary. When Jesus saw Mary there, and John whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “***Woman, here is your son***,” and to the disciple, “***Here is your mother***.” (26,27) In the midst of excruciating pain on the cross Jesus cared for his mother Mary and asked John to take care of her in his place. How painful it was when Mary saw her son suffering on the cross! She remembered what Simeon said to her when she brought the baby Jesus to the temple. Simeon predicted Mary’s pain for the crucified Jesus saying, *“…And a sword will pierce your own soul, too.*” (Lk 2:35)

Second, it is finished (28-37) Look at verse 28. “***Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty***.” In such extreme pain on the cross Jesus was conscious of fulfillment of God’s will. After acknowledging that all things were being done according to God’s plan, he felt thirsty. The loss of blood and his nervous tension, and his exposure to hot weather generated his thirst. Wine vinegar was provided for him to quench his thirst. Psalm 69:21says, “*They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.*” Look at verse 30. “***When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit***.” “It is finished.” was one of the seven words which Jesus said on the cross. What did he mean that when he said, “It is finished”? He meant that God’s will was fulfilled. The work of redemption was complete. His mission was over. All the prophecies and words about world salvation from Genesis to Malachi were fulfilled through his cross. Jesus endured the cross until God’s will was fulfilled. He was hung on the tree to the end until God’s work was done. He was there until his mission was over.

The word “It is finished” is *tetelestai*, which means, not only “fulfilling”, but also “paying a debt” in Greek. “*tetelestai*” means “paid in full.” In other words Jesus paid it all, like the hymn. Jesus paid the penalty of our sins on the cross to set us free. Those who have debts know how blessed we are if we are free from the debts. Jesus set us free from the debt of our sins by his precious blood, which is the ransom payment. Praise Jesus! The moment when we hear Jesus’ word, “It is finished”, our sins are paid off. The moment when we hear Jesus’ word, “It is finished,” the life of curse is over. The moment when we hear Jesus’ word “It is finished,” new life in Christ starts. **After Jesus said this, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.** (30) Is there anyone among us who is still suffering from the condemnation of sin? Come to the cross and hear his words, “It is finished”. Is there anyone who doubts the love of God? Please come to Jesus and hear his words, “It is finished.” Is there anyone who wants to start a new life with Christ? Come to the Lord and listen to what he said. Amen!

Look at verses 31-37. “***Now it was the day of Preparation and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken,” and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.”*** The Roman soldiers usually left the bodies of criminal on their crosses as a warning to potential offenders. But the Jewish law forbade leaving hanged bodies on the cross overnight (Deut 21:22-23; Josh 8:29) So the solders broke the legs of the living victims to hasten death. If their legs were broken, they could not breathe properly because of the loss of supporting their weight, and death would follow shortly. But the soldiers did not break the legs of Jesus because they found that he was already dead. The execution squad was well acquainted with the signs of death. So instead of breaking Jesus’ legs they pierced his side with a spear to see whether there would be any reaction. The blood and water gushed out from his side. Medically the separation of blood and water is the evidence of his death. Some people say that Jesus was fainted and ran away from the cross overnight. But, how could the injured Jesus come down from the cross and walk away? No way!

John saw all these to fulfill the Scripture. “*Not one of his bones will be broken*,” (Exodus 12:46, Num 9:12; Ps 34:20) and “*They will look on the one they have pierced*.” (Zech 12:10) Psalm 22:16 says, “*Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet*.” The prophet Isaiah prophesied, “*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities…”* What is the meaning of his blood? 1 John 1:7 says, “…*and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin*”. God paid the price of our sins by his blood. As the angels of the Lord passed over the house stained by the blood of the lamb, the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus, enabled us to cross from death to life. Amen!

Third, Two righteous men (38-42) There were two secret disciples of Jesus who took care of his body and prepared his burial. One was Joseph of Arimathea, and the other Nicodemus. Joseph did not identify himself as a follower of Jesus because of fear of the Jews. But after he witnessed the trial and death of Jesus, he was changed. He became bold to ask for Jesus’ body from Pilate for his burial. Nicodemus was the one who had visited Jesus at night in John 3. He also brought 75 pound perfume for Jesus’ burial. These two men wrapped Jesus’ body with linen according to Jewish burial custom. (40) They were not fearful of the Jews anymore. Something happened in their hearts to do something for Jesus. They put the wrapped Jesus into the tomb which was assigned for Joseph. Those who witnessed Jesus’ death and heard his words on the cross and saw the natural response to his death were convinced that Jesus is the Son of God. This is why John wrote this book and why we have eternal life through faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

Remember Jesus who shed his precious blood on the cross! In the Old Testament the high priests killed an animal, took its blood, and sprinkled it on the altar for the forgiveness of sins of their people. But now Jesus took his own blood and entered into the Holy Place. Why his blood? There is no forgiveness of sin without shedding blood. (He 9:22) May God help us renew our hearts for the cross of Jesus! May God help us to come to the cross and see his face and hear his words, ‘It is finished!” Amen.