

So Pilate delivered him over to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.

There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription, and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

Many of the Jews read the inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city and it was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate,

"Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am the King of the Jews.'"

Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom,

so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be."

This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to his disciple, "Behold, your mother!"

And from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture). "I thirst."

A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished." And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:16-30

"It is Finished"

Pastor Stephen Ridge

Last Sunday at the church door, a man who had really listened to the story of Jesus' trial remarked to me that John's gospel does not put *"the Jews"* in a very positive light. It was a useful reminder to me that when we read what John writes about *"the Jews,"* it's important to remember that he is not describing all the Jews. After all, John himself was a Jew, as was Jesus and pretty much all Jesus' disciples were Jews when these events in John's gospel took place. So, in John's gospel, the term *"the Jews"* typically describes the temple and synagogue authorities, who, as a class of people, tended to loathe Jesus and hate the gospel.

These were the people who howled for Jesus' crucifixion, but in chapter 23 of Luke's gospel, we read that there was *"a great multitude of the people,"* Jewish people, who, Luke tells us, mourned and lamented on Good Friday at the terrible cruelty and injustices that Jesus suffered on his way to the cross. The point being that powerful, self satisfied people in every ethnic group have tended to hate and fear the repentance Jesus teaches and they tend to doubt the promises he made in his gospel. On the other hand, in every ethnic group, there have been people willing to change their ways and trust Jesus for the forgiveness and help he offers.

So ethnicity is beside the point. Some Roman soldiers were unbelievably cruel, but a number of Roman centurions appear in the gospels as generous, open hearted, faithful people. Many priests and rabbi's were close-hearted and full of hate, but others showed up at Jesus' door with questions, stood up for him in the Sanhedrin, and soon one will pay to see Jesus buried like a king. The point being that believers don't come from a certain kind of people, they come from the most unlikely places with the most unlikely stories and that is good news for most of us. But sadly this morning's passage opens with Jesus in the worst possible company.

A platoon of Roman executioners laid hold of Jesus in the Praetorium, planted a wooden cross beam on his torn and bloodied shoulders and marched him out of the city toward a place known by the locals as *"The Skull."* Leon Morris remembers that 1800 years before Jesus, in Genesis 22, Isaac the son of Abraham had also been made by his father to carry the wood for his own sacrifice up Mount Moriah. Strangely, we cannot say with any certainty where The Skull, Golgotha, is or where Mount Moriah is. But countless rabbi's through the centuries have guessed that Mount Moriah was an ancient name for what we now call Mount Zion.

If that's so, it's possible that Isaac and Jesus, 1800 years apart, each carried their own load of wood up the same slope to the same place where each was slated to die. That Jesus was sacrificed on a hillock named The Skull was likely less a matter of geography and more a matter of theology. The original gospel promise, really more of a threat to the Serpent in Genesis 3, was that a descendant of the fallen Woman would be *"bruised"* by the Serpent, a foot injury, but in that moment the Woman's offspring would *"bruise"* the Serpent's head. So at the cross, Jesus suffered an injury that was not ultimately fatal, but Satan took a head blow that was.

The story is foreshadowed some 1300 years before Christ in the Book of Judges. An ancient antichrist named Sisera led a Canaanite army against the tribes of northern Israel and was so soundly defeated that he had to escape from the field of battle on foot, by himself. Sisera fled to the tent of a neutral tribe, the Kenites, and found there a woman named Jael whose husband was not home, and he prevailed on her to conceal him from the Israelites who might come hunting for him while he recovered from the ordeal of combat and defeat. So Jael allowed the tyrant into her tent and encouraged him to lay down with a jug of warm milk. And then, while Sisera slept, the woman, Jael, took a hammer and drove a tent peg through the tyrant's head.

The point being that the cross with Jesus on it that the Romans slammed into a hole on the place called The Skull, can best be understood as Christ, the Offspring of the Woman, doing to Satan what Jael had done to Sisera many centuries before. It is a connection that is underlined when the woman who gave birth to Jesus appears at Golgotha to bear witness to his triumph over the Serpent at the cross. As Jesus' life slowly ebbed away on the cross, the four soldiers responsible for his cross set themselves to claiming the reward that traditionally belonged to Roman executioners, the possessions of the convict they put to death.

It was only Jesus' clothing, though we need to remember that hand-sown, handmade clothing was worth much more in the ancient world than the factory stuff we wear today. They divided Jesus' robe four ways, but then hesitated to tear his hand woven tunic, and decided to cast lots for it instead. John remarks that their decision fulfilled a remarkable, thousand year old prophecy that David had sung, the Call to Worship we read this morning. In all the gospels, the psalms will serve as the soundtrack for Jesus' sacrifice.

He will sing verse after verse from different psalms as he died as his way of testifying that everything he suffered was according to the plan he and the Father had made long, long before that day. Leon Morris notes that four women appeared under the cross, Mary, the Lord's mother, her sister who is unnamed, another Mary, the wife of a man named Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. So while the four soldiers plunder Jesus' worldly goods, the four women will receive from Jesus a spiritual inheritance that really matters.

He looks down from the cross and sees his mother, probably entirely propped up by *"the disciples Jesus loved,"* John, we think. And Jesus says to her, *"Woman, behold your son."* There is a distance, a formality to his words that suggest that Jesus is after more than simply providing care for his mom. He has three strapping younger brothers who could do that. But I think Jesus sees especially her, but also the women with her as the necessary female ingredient to God's redemptive plan.

He is the Offspring of the Woman, and the Bridegroom of the Church, and I think he is teaching here that the care and leadership of the Church is necessary for women, and that the participation and contribution of women is necessary for the Church. In other words, part and parcel with saving our souls is the necessity that men and women join hands and learn to work together in the building of God's kingdom and the living out of gospel faith in our families, in our churches, and in the communities where we serve. It is a gesture fraught with implications, and we don't have time to get into it all today.

Because soon after uniting his mom with *"the disciple" he "loved,"* Jesus begins to die and returns again to the psalms. *After this,* John writes, *"Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the Scripture, 'I thirst.' A jar full of sour wine stood there..."* In Psalm 69, David, in the bitterness of some betrayal or another, had sung about being served *"sour wine"* for his *"thirst"* by friends who weren't his friends. The soldiers heard Jesus' faint singing and soaked a sponge from their wine jar and lifted it to his mouth. And John carefully notes that Jesus took a full draught, *"received the sour wine,"* John writes.

It's a curious thing because in Luke's gospel, at the Last Supper, Jesus offered the Communion cup to the disciples and then promised, *"...from now on, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom comes."* Yet, in John's gospel, once he knows that *"all is finished,"* he allows himself a drink, and then goes on to make himself a toast: *"It is finished,"* he announces to anyone there to hear him. It really is good news, a word of gospel. He has not allowed himself to die, not allowed his suffering to end till every last sin of every last soul who will trust him is paid for. The point being that the moment we truly trust him, the moment we give our lives into his care and let him be Lord in our hearts, we are saved. It is finished.

Because being saved is not a matter of how hard we've tried or how well we've done. It is a matter of simply being his and trusting him to do the work and make the changes we could never make unless he forgave us and sent his Spirit to live in our hearts. It is finished. We can rest in the forgiveness he won for us, we can trust the love he promised us, and let him teach us and help us to live that out day by day.