

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished." (John 19.30)

Finished. Done. Complete.

This sixth last word of Jesus is really just one word. And this little word was mostly used to signify that the final payment on a debt had been paid. The terms of the loan were now met. There is a big mark across the bill that reads simply, "PAID." The last word of Jesus is a word that brings hope; the hope of freedom.

Have you ever paid off a financial obligation? Remember how it felt to open up the bank note and see "PAID" across the page? Even if it wasn't a large loan there was a sense of relief and freedom. The longed hoped for outcome has finally arrived. The hard work paid off. And now there is now not only freedom from debt but freedom to consider new ways of living life, of planning that trip of a lifetime or buying a house or whatever. You are now free to move into your future.

"It's finished." Everything has been taken care of. The bill is paid. Everything is in order and complete. This is what Jesus is saying in this little word. Everything is now being brought to a culmination in this moment just as Jesus is about to breathe his last. The Jesus of John's gospel does not die until he has completed all his work, even this work of dying on the cross.

In each of the words that Jesus speaks from the cross he points to a larger purpose of God's for the world. When Jesus says, "It is finished," he means that his own earthly work done and that his Father's work of salvation for the world is completed too. The Scripture has been fulfilled. The world now has a new order. The creation is new again.

It is interesting that John's gospel begins with the Creation. "In the beginning" is how the text begins. We are immediately brought into a place where the freshness of the new garden fills our imaginations. "In the beginning" there was a void. "In the beginning" there was only God's dream. "In the beginning" there was God's breath, his spirit, his WORD. God speaks and life happens. God breathes out his Word and creation inhales the Word. "In the beginning" all things were made through the Word, and without the Word was not anything made that was made. (John 1.3) Stars, moon, sun, trees, animals, everything was filled with the WORD, filled with life. Humans did too. Made in the image of God (perhaps we should say "made to reflect God") humans were filled with God's breath, his Word. The creation was perfect "in the beginning."

But, then comes the apple, the serpent, the fall, the casting out, the jealousy, the hatred, and the violence – death. And, sin abounded in the Creation God had called "good." Sin made sick the Creature God called "very good." What now? God called forth prophets and sages and leaders and kings who served him in their days. But, none of them ever finished the job. Something always happened. None of them finished the job. It was too big. It was too much. There was too much brokenness.

Jesus comes into the picture. The Word, John calls him. Lamb of God. Son of David. Holy One. He comes to set the world right. He comes to gather all people to himself. He comes to finish the task. He and only he can finish. He and only he can make everything new. Only he can mark the bill "PAID."

And this sixth last word is a sign – the seventh sign in John’s gospel. For John signs are those acts of Jesus which reveal God’s glory in the world. The signs begin with Jesus turning water into wine in John 2. From that point on we see Jesus reveal God’s glory by signs including: the healing of a noble man’s son (John 4); the healing of a paralyzed man in the pool at Bethesda (John 5); the loaves and the fishes (John 6); the healing of a man born blind (John 9) and the raising of the dead man, Lazarus (John 11). N.T. Wright contends that John would not stop listing signs at six thus the seventh of Jesus’ signs is the crucifixion itself.

The number seven is significant. Seven is the number of completion. In seven days God fashioned creation. In seven signs Jesus reveals God’s glory in saving that same creation. This seventh sign to which John points is in fact the signal that God’s purpose is now fulfilled. God’s salvation is completed. It is finished. God’s glory will now shine in the world.

But his glory will now shine in the world, not through Jesus his son, but rather through those who would dare to take up the cross and follow him. Salvation has been completed. It is finished. However, it is left to the followers of Jesus to carry that Good News message “to the ends of the earth.” It is left to the followers of Jesus to let his final word proclaim an end to the old debts of sin and death weighing down their own lives. It is left to the followers of Jesus to walk away from sin and death and embrace the freedom of being a new creation in Jesus Christ. It is left to the followers of Jesus – to us – to allow our lives to shine brightly with the very light of freedom and renewal of Christ Jesus in the world.

Last Words: Words of Hope

It is finished - 28 March 2012

The Rev. Ram López

The Lenten journey is drawing to a close. It is almost finished. We have dug deep into the soil of hope. Let us look to the end of this journey with the knowledge the race is won. Let us look to the end of our journey with the knowledge that it is almost finished. Let us take hope that at the finish is the empty tomb. Let us raise our eyes and heed the beckoning call of Jesus who invites us to live in confidence and freedom for his sake and for the world. Let us place our full trust and hope in Jesus through whom salvation is fully and completely accomplished once and for all. We are free to move into the future God desires for us.

It is finished.