

Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta
“God’s One-way Love of Grace” (John 19:30)
Good Friday: April 10, 2020
Dave Johnson

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the 2015 documentary *De Palma* legendary film director Brian De Palma discusses his decades of work, including classic gritty films like *Carrie* (1976), *Mission Impossible* (1996), and my favorite, *The Untouchables* (1987). (A piece of free trivia for you, Brian De Palma also directed the music video for Bruce Springsteen’s 1984 hit “Dancing in the Dark”, which marked the big break for the young lady invited on stage to dance with the Boss, Courtney Cox). Near the end of this documentary Brian De Palma says something both incisive and vulnerable: “The thing about making movies is every mistake you made is up there on the screen, everything you didn’t solve, every short cut you took, you will look at it the rest of your life, so it’s like a record of the things you didn’t finish.”

In your life, which I hope has not been as gritty as Brian De Palm’s films, although for some of you it has, you have your own mistakes, your own things that you did not solve, your own short cuts you have taken, and your own records of the things you did not finish. These things are not projected on a movie screen in a theater, but they are projected on the movie screen of your mind and heart, and whether you admit it or not, you will look at these things for the rest of your life.

But on Good Friday, when Jesus’ passion and death made Brian De Palma films seem like animated Disney films in comparison, our Savior did not make any mistakes, did not leave anything unsolved, did not take any shortcuts, did not leave anything unfinished. Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the world, was born to die. In the two historic creeds we recite most often in our worship, we move directly from Jesus’ birth to his death. In The Apostles’ Creed we say “He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried” (*The Book of Common Prayer* 96), and in The Nicene Creed “by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried” (*BCP* 358).

The account of Jesus' passion in the Gospel According to John, which we read every year on Good Friday, builds up to Jesus' final words on the cross, final words that clearly demonstrate that he completed everything he needed to—"It is finished." When it comes to your salvation Jesus did not make any mistakes, Jesus did not leave anything unsolved, Jesus did not take any shortcuts. In fact, Jesus took every mistake you have made, everything in your life you have been unable to solve, every shortcut you have taken, all the things you have not finished, all of it upon himself—it's all up there, not on a movie screen, but on the cross. Scripture puts it this way: "For in (Jesus) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:19-20).

In the back of *The Book of Common Prayer* there is an often overlooked but theologically loaded section called "Historical Documents of the Church", which includes the "Articles of Religion" (otherwise known as The Thirty-Nine Articles) which were completed as a summary of the doctrine of the Anglican Church in the late sixteenth century during the reign of Elizabeth I. Listen to how Article XXXI elaborates on Jesus' words "It is finished": "The Offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin, but that alone" (*The Book of Common Prayer* 874). Again, as Jesus said, "It is finished."

When it comes to your salvation, you do not have the final word, Jesus does, and his final word is "It is finished." This is something we all need to be reminded of again and again in the same way that again and again we need to be reminded that we are loved. When it comes to your loved ones telling you, "I love you"—no matter how many times, is it ever enough? Do you ever reach a point when someone says, "I love you," and you reply, "Yeah, I know, you don't need to keep reminding me." It is the same when it comes to your being reminded that God's words to you are, "I love you" and that God's words regarding your salvation are "It is finished." It is like asking for a price check at the dollar store, where every single day the price of every single thing in the entire store is always a dollar—and yet someone who will ask, "How much is this?" "It's a dollar." "Okay, just making sure, thanks." How much do you need to add to Jesus' finished work on the cross? Nothing. You can keep asking in order to keep making sure, but the answer will always be the same, because as Jesus said, "It is finished."

One of the five best theological books I have ever read is *Grace in Practice* by our friend Paul Zahl. In one of the many high water marks of this amazing book he brilliantly unpacks Jesus' final words, "It is finished." Listen to this:

The atonement of Christ puts all human crime and punishment on a bigger stage. The Judge is the same, God. The offender is everybody, for everybody is capable of a crime that destroys other lives. Most people, at least once in their life, have hurt another person in a ripping, incising way. There is a big condition of the earth to be engaged here. The guilt is widespread. It extends from the outward acts of the self to the inward thoughts of the self. The guilt is so omnipresent that only a vast event could absorb it.

Then Paul Zahl writes about this "vast event":

The atonement of Christ is the death of an innocent man in the place of every guilty man and woman. It is representative, as his death "represents" the death of every single guilty human person. It is vicarious because it is in their place. He dies vicariously so each of them will not have to die for the sin they inherently and historically bear. It is substitutionary because he actually takes on their identity. He is an "identity thief" in the fructifying sense that their old identity, as a sinner, transfers to him; and his identity, as the perfect man for others, goes to them. It is an exchange. It is a one-way exchange because, as God, he alone can make this happen. I could wish for it, but I could never bring it off. It is the one-way love of grace (117).

"The one-way love of grace" is what Good Friday is all about. Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate proof of God's "one-way love of grace" for the whole world, and for you. This "one-way love of grace" is for everyone, no exceptions. In fact, the same John who recorded Jesus' final words on the cross, "It is finished", is the same John who was the only one of the Twelve disciples actually at the foot of the cross when Jesus said that. John was literally an eyewitness and ear-witness of Jesus' death, and later wrote in his First Letter: "If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). "It is finished" ... John saw it, John heard it, and John wrote it down.

One of my favorite gospel singers is the incomparable Mavis Staples. She sings about this comprehensive nature of God’s “one-way love of grace” toward the whole world in a gorgeous song called “In Christ There is no East or West”:

In Christ there is no East or West, no north or south
Only one great love inside and out
True hearts everywhere, some deaf and some blind
Singin’ one melody lost souls cannot find

So join hands and have faith, whatever your race may be
Who serves my Father as a son is surely kin to me
In Christ now meet both east and west, there is no black or white
Only one great love hatred cannot divide

Join hands and have faith, forgive your enemy
Surely we’re all a part of one big family
(On her 2010 album *You’re Not Alone*)

And you, *you*, are a part of this “one big family”—which points back to the moving collect we prayed earlier, “Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross” (*BCP* 221). Jesus’ words, “It is finished” are for you and for the whole world.

One more brief illustration...of my favorite places in the world is the pier in Santa Monica, California, which marks the end of historic U.S. Route 66, the “Mother Road of America” that runs east to west for 2,448 miles from Chicago, Illinois all the way to Santa Monica. One of these days I hope to drive that whole highway. The official end of Route 66 is literally on the Santa Monica pier, where there is a sign that reads, “Santa Monica, 66, End of the Trail.” U. S. Route 66, the “Mother Road of America,” ends at largest ocean in the world, the Pacific.

When it comes to your salvation, at the end of the mother road of your life there is a different sign—the cross—that reads, “It is finished” and means all the sins of the one big family of the whole world, including yours, are at the bottom of an ocean infinitely larger than the Pacific, the ocean of God’s one-way love of grace.

Amen.