



*Oasis of Grace*

**Reaching the end of life: It Is Finished**

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Palm Sunday  
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My first trip from St. Louis to Pennsylvania took me through Chicago O'Hare. I was full of anticipation as I thought about the next place I would serve as a Transition Pastor. The flight from O'Hara was uneventful with clear blue skies as we headed southeast. The plane began to descend and I could see Harrisburg International Airport in the distance alongside the Susquehanna River. The plane banked to the North over the river as we made our final approach.

Looking out the window, I could see an all too familiar island with cooling towers rising from the land and with nuclear reactors 1 and 2 attached to the turbine building sitting nearby. This was Three Mile Island and my mind took me back to what had happened long ago.

The partial melt down of Unit 2 reactor on March 28, 1979 brought local, national and world attention. This was a frightening time in our country and the world as we watched and listened to the news. We all knew that this would affect people's lives and influence the future of the nuclear industry. To this day, Unit 2 reactor is shut down. This was the most serious nuclear accident in U.S. history.

Friends, you and I have witnessed many events that have affected us greatly. Some of you know the horror of war with the surprise attacks on Pearl Harbor as well as the conflicts and battles in different parts of the world thus far. Many of you remember the Great Depression. Some of us remember what happened on 2008. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the crash of United flight 93 in a field near Somerset, Pennsylvania have affected our lives profoundly. The loss of a loved one strikes at the heart of what is dear to us in everyday life and we remember them daily.

Each of the events that have been mentioned this morning is but a few of those occurrences that we each have experienced at times in our lives. We may experience them alone or with others because we were there. Regardless, we walk away with a new and different understanding of life and yes, even death.

As Christians, we read from Holy Scripture the events of God and God's Son in salvation history. This time of lent reminds us of the events that Jesus went through and how he showed us what unconditional love is all about. From the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem through all the events leading up to his crucifixion he showed us the ultimate sacrifice of his life.

The study of Adam Hamilton's book *"The Final Words from the Cross"* has allowed us to examine the last events of the Lord's life on the cross. Jesus said, "It is finished"..."Into your hands i commit my spirit."

The scene on the hill of Golgotha is a stark picture of three crosses with two criminals and Jesus nailed to the timbers. The soldiers who led him out of Jerusalem and mocked him were the ones who were there to nail his hands and feet. The disciples were there along with Mary. There were others there who wanted to see the lord for the last time as he hung there on the cross. The witness to it all was God. He saw it all.

You know friends, we were there too. We have experienced Christ by accepting him as Lord and Savior. Through the reading of scripture we are transported to the events and time of Jesus.

Hamilton states what we know to be true in our hearts as we follow the Lord. He writes, "Jesus is our Redeemer, our Savior, our High Priest, our Paschal and Atoning Lamb. He is our Liberator and the King who is willing to die for his people. Through his death he reveals our sinfulness, the costliness of grace, and the magnitude of God's mercy."

The scene at the cross shows us how Jesus offered salvation to one of the thieves who were also crucified. The man affirms his own sins and recognizes the Lord's innocence. He said to Jesus, <sup>42</sup> ...**"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."** Christ answered him, **"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."** Jesus gave the thief assurance of a new life in paradise. Even in the last moments of his life, Jesus offered the thief, the man, salvation.

Hamilton lifts up that the Gospel of John is the only gospel that states what Jesus said, <sup>30</sup>...**"It is finished."** **With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.** John 19:30 (NIV) The word "finished" in the Greek "is **Τέτέω** (teléō) which means to end, complete, execute, accomplish or pay." [Blue Letter Bible] William Willmon wrote, "Something astounding, amazing, and awesome was finished as Jesus died on the cross – a masterpiece of love and redemption."

Now we shift to another scene where a larger picture is painted about the Lord's last breath and words. The Luke passage gives a dynamic picture full of images around the Lord's last words. The time of the crucifixion was about noon during the brilliance of the day and near the time of his death, darkness moves over the land.

While inside the temple, the large, one piece curtain which was lifted for a priest to enter, was torn at the time of the Lord's death. Hamilton writes, "It was torn in two – a powerful image that from this time on there no longer would be a need for the curtain. Through Jesus human beings would now come directly to God's mercy seat – to cross to ask for mercy and to receive God's grace."

Jesus then called out with his last breathe from the cross **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."** He died and gave up his spirit to God. In many ways Jesus prayed these words based on Psalm 31 verses 1 thru 5 which you can find as part of the Call to Worship this morning. The living images of refuge, deliverance, rescue, strong fortress, rock, and guide breathe through this Psalm.

I can remember asking my Dad before he left for a synod meeting in a distant state what he prayed before he left. He said, I pray similar words that Jesus said on the cross and would expand it to include my love ones. He prayed, "O God, I

commit my spirit into your hands and I entrust my family into your care. Amen. To this day, I pray this prayer whenever I fly or when I travel to a city to lead a congregation. I also pray this prayer for the congregation I'm about to serve and am presently serving.

Friends, Christ entrusted us into God's care and gracious love. In the ordinary times of our lives, we experience the grace of God when we remember and affirm the event that changed our lives. Even the Centurion at the cross was transformed and acknowledged <sup>47</sup> ..., **seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."**

My dear brothers and sisters, you and I know the truth about Jesus as a righteous man and the Savior of our lives. We can recall the experiences in our lives that were life changing – pearl harbor, the great depression, 9/11, a nuclear meltdown, the death of a family member or a friend. The event of Jesus dying for us is life changing.

Our Lord died for us for the Atonement for our sins. Through his death he reconciled us with God. He entered the world to change lives and to forgive us of our sins so we can have an abundant life.

In his book *Written in Blood*, Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease the boy had recovered from two years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

"Would you give your blood to Mary?" the doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, "Sure, for my sister." Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room--Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. Now as the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny's smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube. With the ordeal almost over, his voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence. "Doctor, when do I die?"

"Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated, why his lip had trembled when he'd agreed to donate his blood. He thought giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life. In that brief moment, he'd made his great decision to give something important to his sister. Johnny, fortunately, didn't have to die to save his sister.

Each of us, however, has a condition more serious than Mary's, and it required Jesus to give not just his blood but his life."

Yes! Jesus died for each of us and reconciled us with God. "It is finished...Into your hands I commit my spirit." Christ reconciled us to God.

Dear Lord, thank you for the beauty, the majesty, and the wonder of the cross. Thank you that it was for us. In response may our daily prayer be, "Into your hand I commit my spirit." Yes, Lord; into your hands we commit our spirit. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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## Scriptural support:

John 19:30 (NIV)

<sup>30</sup> When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Luke 23:43-47 (NIV)                      The Death of Jesus

<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

<sup>44</sup> It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, <sup>45</sup> for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

<sup>47</sup> The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.”

John 12:12-19 (NIV)

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

<sup>12</sup> The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the king of Israel!”

<sup>14</sup> Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: <sup>15</sup> “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”

<sup>16</sup> At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

<sup>17</sup> Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. <sup>18</sup> Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. <sup>19</sup> So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”