Good Friday
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IN NOMINE JESU

John 19: 30 . . . He said, It is finished, and He bowed His head, and gave up the Ghost.

The scene of Christ's crucifixion has long been a favorite for painters of religious compositions. Among all the artists who have sought to reproduce th picture of the dead or dying Christ, Peter Rubens perhaps takes first place. In his life-size painting entitled Christ on the Cross our attention is irresistibly drawn to the center of the picture where the figure of Christ, relaxed in death, hangs as in a bright light. The thorn-crowned head rests on the right shoulder, thereby obscuring a corner of that ironic, trinitarian superscription Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. His throne is a cross, His crown is of thorns, His scepter is a set of cruel nails, and His subjects are rebels and cowards! It is obvious that a soldier has already pierced His uncovered side. In uncontrollable grief, Mary Magdalene is on her knees and can be seen embracing the cross and His feet. To the right stands John, his right hand on his heart, gazing in unbelieving amazement at the unresponsive face of the Lord he has so dearly loved. On the other side of the cross, within arm's length of her Divine Son, is Mary. Her back is to the cross, but she cannot keep her swollen eyes off its Prey. She is no longer able to weep, but can only wring her hands and mutely ponder the plaguing question, Why? Some of the more imposing buildings of the city of Jerusalem are visible in the background, where several frightened figures are taking a last look at the cross from a distance, beating their breasts as they go.

Even as in any painting of it, the actual scene on Calvary just before the removal of Christ's body must be one of stark tragedy. How different Christ's death was from His birth! Angels sang over the fields of Bethlehem on the night of His birth, but no angels are visible on Calvary; in fact, one can easily imagine devils lurking in the background. A great star dropped its bright rays on the place where the young Child lay; an eery darkness now surrounds His body as He hangs on the cross. The face of Mary must have been beaming in happy smile as she looked tenderly upon her precious Babe lying in the manger cradle; exhaustion, grief, and perplexity are on her aging face as she now stands by her dead Son.

The wealthy and the wise, the humble and the unlettered came to pay homage to the Holy Infant; no strangers appeared on Golgatha to give Him honor. Great and good gifts were brought to Bethlehem; on Calvary the soldiers have taken from Him practically all His clothes. Glorious things were spoken of Him in prophecy at His conception, at His birth, during His infant years and at the beginning of His public ministry. Yet there is no visible glory at the time of His death - only tragedy and seeming defeat. All His life He had done His divine best. He had done no wrong. Always He had loved His people, but they chose to turn against Hi He had honored the government, but it decided unjustly to kill Him. The supreme joy and energy of His life had gone into the building of God's Kingdom, but a sadly corrupted church determined viciously to oppose Him and to demand His destruction.

Yet, in spite of all that has been said, the tragic scene on Calvary is actually the picture of outstanding triumph, the greatest victory in heaven and earth, in time and eternity. And from where does this triumph come? It does not come from His death, for death is common to all who have been born of woman. More than a hundred human beings die in our world every minute. Nor does it come from the fact that He died in agony. A painful death is not unusual. Neither does it come from the fact that He died for His convictions. History is crowded with the names of those who willingly died because they refused to compromise their convictions. Again, it does not come from the fact that His life was a sacrifice. Fathers and mothers have died for their children, friends for friends, patriots for their country, ever since the story of man has been recorded. The great triumph of Christ Crucified streams from one sole fact, namely that He, God's own Son died for the redemption of all humanity!

Christ's second-last word from the cross was a shout of victory. It is finished! If He had been thinking only of His life, this would have been an admission of defeat and not a cry of triumph. It is impossible for us who live far beyond the hour of Christ's death - who know the story of His resurrection - to

appreciate even in a small way the sense of tragedy that must have swept over those who were grieved at the actual loss of His life. They had never heard the Easter story; in fact, they seemingly had not even dreamed of it. They might hav sought to console themselves by emphasizing that for Christ there would be no mor pain, no more suffering, no more ridicule, no more disappointment. But uppermost in their mind was the distressing knowledge that there would be no more sermons and no more miracles, no more comfort and no more encouragement, no more guidance and no more companionship. It is finished did not sound like victory to Mary, John, or Magdalene.

When a loaf of bread is finished it has served its usefulness; however, when a book is finished it is ready for usefulness. When Christ shouted It is finished, He was thinking not of something that had fulfilled its purpose, but of something that was now ready to serve a purpose. His death had accomplished something. It had completed the work for which He had come into the world. Already at the age of twelve He had displayed His determination to carry out the work of His Father by asking meaningfully, Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business? He had begun His ministry with the same high regard for His Father's business, for He had told His disciples, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work. Throughout His ministry it had been evident that He had a plan in mind and that He was living according to it. His eyes were constantly fixed on a goal toward which He moved with unwavering steadfastness. His daily prayer seemed to be: I come to do Thy will, O God. His death on the Cross was the culmination of the work He had come to do.

A few hours before His death, as He had been communing with His Father in His great High Priestly Prayer, Christ had been able to say: I have finished the work which thou gavest Me to do. He was referring to His work as a prophet. He had preached His last sermon. The people of His generation would hear Him no more, neither from the mountain-side, nor by the seashore, nor in the Temple. But when the Savior cried from the Cross, It is finished, His words applied to His

entire life's work and its meaning for the whole world. Several months before Hi death He had revealed to His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, an be raised again the third day. Now He had come to Jerusalem and His death had taken place. After His resurrection He indicated to two of His disciples on the way to Emmaus that His Passion had not been unexpected, by pointing to the prophets and asking, Ought not Christ to have suffered these things? Someone has said, You can endure great difficulties and hardships when you follow a great aim. The difficulties and hardships endured by our Lord were great beyond comprehensio But look at His aim! He wanted to save all men that they might live with Him in heaven throughout eternity. And now it had become an accomplished fact!

Think once more of what Christ had effected by suffering and dying. He had triumphed over sin. The cup of the world's iniquity was now empty. Peter reminds us that the Savior His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness. In going down to the grave Christ made a hole big enough to bury all the sin of all time. It is now no longer necessary for us to stand on trial for our sin before the all-knowing, just and righteous God. Pardon has been granted and we need but accept it by faith.

In suffering and dying Christ had triumphed over death. Isaiah had fore told of the Messiah: He will swallow up death in victory. Death made a fatal mistake when it laid its hands on our Lord. It thereby lost its own power. Paul could write to Timothy: Our Savior Jesus Christ...hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gsopel. We can say with John, who on that first Good Friday had been so deeply grieved by death: There shall be no more death. Paul tells us: And you...hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses. We shall die temporally, but as we in faith have looked upon our triumphant Savior, our death will be our entrance into life eterna

In suffering and dying Christ had triumphed over the powers of iniquity. Satan had indeed bruised His heel, but the head of Satan had been crushed. Having

spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Can you think of greater triumph than winning a decisive victory over Sin, Death, and Satan? It is not difficult at all for us standing at the foot of the Cross today to hear the voice of God the Father saying triumphantly: This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. We have as good, if not a better, view of the triumph of Christ Crudified than did anyone on Calvary. For we have a clearer revelation of the meaning of His death than did any of those who witnessed it. Martensen Larsen wrote that he sometimes imagined God as sitting before a great Bible. The Bible pages had wide margins so that God could record next to each verse the names of those who had come to faith while pondering it. In some places there were so many names, there was scarcely room for them. One of the verses that had the most names written beside it was our text: ... He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.

By faithewe are identified with Christ's triumph on Calvary. As we thrill at His great triumph over all evil we join Paul in singing two short stanzas of gratitude: Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ told us, In heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven. Some day we shall join them. When Christ opened th eyes of the man who had been born blind, the first thing the afflicted man saw wa the face of His Savior. Soon - it may be sooner than we think - death will close our eyes. After that, the first sight we will have will include the beloved face of our triumphant Lord. Thank God! IT IS FINISHED! Thank God! OUR REDEMPTION IS COMPLETE! Thank God!

Amen.