

**GOOD FRIDAY MEDITATION**  
**Grace Church in Haddonfield, March 25, 2005**  
**Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close**  
**“It is finished.”**

Today the focus of our Easter Triduum is the death of Jesus. As we read the Passion Story, we have seen Jesus arrested, tried and convicted. The forces of religion and government have conspired to put Jesus to death. He is such a threat to their way of life that they can't let him live. The crowds that only a few days before heralded his coming are caught up in the frenzy and call for Jesus' death. It is Good Friday. Jesus is going to die.

The suffering servant of Isaiah is being fulfilled today on Golgotha. Jesus came and preached good news. But he associated with the unacceptable ones. He challenged the authority and rules that had kept order. The leaders could not accept his revelation. They could not see the Divine hand of God at work in Jesus. Now he marches towards the hard wood of the cross ... battered, bruised, humiliated.

Crucifixion was meant to maximize the horror of capital punishment and death. It was the state's way of trying to keep people in line. There was no compassion here. Jesus is treated as a criminal. He has no rights. He is a condemned man. He has no course of appeals. Great Rome has spoken in the person of the Governor, Pontus Pilate. Caesar's justice is being dealt out. Great Jerusalem is satisfied. The trail by the religious leaders has ended with smugness. No more working up the poor, the peasants and the outcasts. The threat to their way of life is being removed. Things will get back to normal soon.

Where are they? All those who followed Jesus? Peter left the courtyard ashamed. His own denial convicts him. Peter could not watch, could not follow Jesus. James, John and all the others ... they have disappeared into the darkness of night. They are nowhere found. The only ones going to the cross with Jesus are women. Those without status in the culture, a mother and a friend ... these are the only ones that dare the wrath of Rome, the scorn of Jerusalem. Their hearts are filled with sadness. The hope for a new world, a new life is ebbing out as the life of Jesus draws closer and closer to its end.

Then there is the pain. The scorching heat of the mid day beats down. The scourging stings his back. His legs are heavy with fatigue. Yet Jesus continues to move towards his destiny. He approaches the cross. He tried to tell the others that this was his calling. He saw it coming long ago. It was so hard for everyone to understand what he was saying and who he was. This is Jesus ... the Messiah? Judas and Thomas was a warrior leader. They longed for a military hero. Andrew and James wanted a new king, a political leader who would restore the good old days. Jesus was none of these. They could not understand. His way was not their ways. God had something different in mind. They were like the Pharisees ... unable to see beyond their own wants and desires.

The nails drove deep into his flesh. He forgot the pain of the thorns on his head and the stripes on his back. The throbbing jaw from last night and the blow of the high priest was nothing compared to the blinding pain that shot through his body. First one hand, then the other. Now the feet. Just when he thought he could begin to bear it, the cross was

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lifted up. Jesus felt as if his whole body was screaming in pain ... such pain. Each breath he took seared his lungs with agonizing pain. He tried to take deeper breaths, but the pressure in his chest weighed like a horse sitting on his chest.

This was the way Jesus would die. No fanfare, no trumpets were heard. No followers, only a couple of friends and his mother stood nearby. He was taunted, mocked and made fun of. The religious leaders came by ... those who should have offered compassion and comfort mocked him even more. They had won, so now they came and gloated over their victory. The soldiers looked bored. They just played dice and chatted aimlessly. Another day for them, keeping the rebel elements in their place. They had lost many soldiers during the occupation. There was no end in sight. These people were stubborn. Their religion mixed with their politics. It was not like the sensible emperor worship of their home.

Then the darkness came. The light of the day disappeared. It felt threatening. The men became silent. Only the rumbling of thunder and the approaching rain broke the hush. Then Jesus spoke, “It is finished.” What is finished? His dying? His life? Is this all there is? All the words, all the healings, all the teaching, they meant nothing? This is not the finish Jesus means. It would be better to say, “It is accomplished!” Not a sentence of resignation, but of completion and triumph! What does Jesus mean by these words? Can he see that his life, and now his death, has meaning??? What has he accomplished?

So often we look at the cross and understand only that death is an ending. It is the end of our striving. We have to relinquish all power, all wealth, and all status. There is nothing left when we die. Most of our actions are meaningless. We spend so much of our time pursuing what the world calls richness. It is all an illusion. Death brings an end to all the false hopes we embrace. There is nothing left to grasp. With our last breath we have to let go. We are no longer in control (were we ever in control?). When we die, and our life is finished, what have we accomplished?

Jesus breathed his last and said it was accomplished. His life was not without meaning. He accomplished what God had sent him to do. He preached, healed and taught. He brought the Kingdom of God closer to many people. Jesus left behind a small community that would wrestle with what they have experienced. He finished the work he was sent to do. He gave his life as a sacrifice, an offering for the sin of the world. He accomplished what no other person could ... he brought salvation into the world. Jesus was God incarnate, the living presence of God in our midst. He did all that he was sent to do. Now we have to wait ... and see ... what God will do next. Is death all there is?

It is finished ...