

## **The Sixth Word: 'It is finished' John 19:30**

It is finished! Jesus, in communion with the Creator of the universe, yet tempted like any other human being, had faultlessly accomplished the task that God had set him to do, making it possible for me, for you and for all people everywhere to be reconciled with God, and our sins to be forgiven that we might have everlasting life.

As someone who has great difficulty finishing things, I stand in awe of people who are able to say "It's finished, the job is done". I can remember on one occasion my brother talking about unfinished business he had with Dad. He and my Dad didn't always agree about everything and, as my Dad died rather suddenly, this meant that there was no longer a chance to reconcile and make amends. When I think of all the times I have failed to make amends in my dealings with other people, I have, like my brother, a lot of unfinished business. How many times have I failed to seize an opportunity to do or say the right thing? Week by week we ask God for forgiveness of our sins. But what does forgiveness mean? And, especially in an age when many people believe that the key to forgiveness of sin is to seek help from a psychiatrist, what does it entail? .

Preparing for this meditation required much soul searching. To describe what the death of Christ means to me personally, I would surely have to reveal all those dreadful deeds I have committed in my lifetime, which are now washed away by the sacrifice of Jesus. To disclose everything would be painful for me, painful for you, and quite impossible in the allotted five minutes. Besides, those deeds are history, God willing, and I go about my daily business trusting in God's grace. On the other hand, I wonder how much meaning there is to a bland statement that ones sins are forgiven without making at least some feeble attempt to elaborate.

When I was seven years old, my brother (who would have been 15) showed me a judo trick. Standing right up close to your opponent, you put your right leg behind their right leg, and push them over backwards. Of course, you support them as they go down so they don't bump their head on the ground. The day after my brother showed me that trick, I looked for someone in the playground during recess on whom to practice my new skill. I chose carefully, knowing that an equal match would mean that my opponent would be as likely to push me over as I would be to push them over. So, for obvious reasons, I did not choose a Peter Duinker or a Paul Friesen. It was a large primary school with more than 1000 children, and the person I selected was a relative stranger. She was about my age and was playing with friends. I could have asked politely if she wouldn't mind being a guinea pig but she likely would have replied "Go away you nasty, horrid, wicked boy!" I don't recall what I did say to her but she came forward and, before she knew what was happening, I had laid her out on her back while her friends looked on in horror. In the space of two or three seconds, I had injured her self-esteem, her sense of security, her self-confidence and, most of all, her trust. I could see that she was close to tears, but she never reported me. Wretched little boy that I must have been at the age of 7, I never made amends for that act.

Some 30 years later, my mother told me about the death of her brother. She was at his bedside holding his hand and my uncle was breathing his last breath. He was unconscious, or so she thought. Earlier in life she had been a nurse, so she was no stranger to seeing people die. She told me later that my uncle suddenly squeezed her hand and that she clearly felt him feeling the ring on her finger, as if to identify her. It

was a ring he had given her. She said that, in a strange way, she felt comforted by this and felt that he too was comforted by knowing that it was her hand. When she told me that little story, I made a secret compact with myself that, if I were fortunate enough to be at her bedside when she died, I would hold her hand. I spent so little time with my mother after I emigrated to Canada. However, by sheer coincidence, I was at her bedside when she died, but the nurse had placed her arms beside her body under the sheet, and had then tucked in the sheet tightly under the mattress. I could so easily have said to the nurse "I want to hold her hand". Why, oh why, did I not do that? It plagues me to this day. It's just another of those countless episodes of unfinished business. The good news is that those failures to make amends and those failures to seize an opportunity to do something positive, those unfinished episodes, were remedied by Jesus when he uttered those three last words: "It is finished."

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