

A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard	Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania, VA
To be delivered on April 14, 2017	On the occasion of Good Friday Ecumenical Service: Seven Last Words of Christ

Sixth Word: John 19:30a “It is finished.”

Culmination of Contradictions

Jesus’ life is almost over. His torturous time on the cross is almost at an end. His final words in John’s Gospel have a note of satisfaction to them. “It is finished.” Not only is his life finished, as in over, his work is finished, as in complete. Jesus has fulfilled his duty. He has accomplished his mission. He has received all that the Father had given him and he now lays down his life for his sheep.

Jesus said that he came that those who believe in him might have life, and have it abundantly. Oddly that mission requires the tragic end to his own life. The author of life dies a horrible death so that we may have abundant life. It is the great irony of our faith, that the cross, an instrument of shame, pain, and death, has become the instrument of our redemption, salvation, and life. Just as it is the unlikely reality that the Son of God came into the world as a humble, poor son of a carpenter.

In fact our faith is full of strange contrasts like that. We are told that those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for Jesus’ sake will find it. We are told that blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep, and those who are reviled for Jesus’ sake. We are told to love our enemies, and to pray even for those who hate us. We are told to forgive seventy-times-seven times, even as we sinners put to death the only sinless man in history who prayed for our forgiveness while we were doing it.

Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, was hailed as a king, then condemned as a criminal. He healed the sick and cast out demons, but was rejected by the religious leaders of his

day. He preached peace and love, but seemed to inspire anger and hatred in so many. No wonder that the religion that follows his way is full of contradiction. We are an odd lot, those who claim Jesus as the Christ and our Lord. We see the cross as none other than the way of life, and what was accomplished there as our salvation. We see it as just the beginning, as the prelude to what happened on the third day. We see it as the place where love was put to death, and yet death itself was defeated for all time.

The cross stands at the center of our Faith. It stands for self-sacrificing love and the triumph of good over evil. It stands in the middle of our lives, reminding us that love demands commitment. The cross stands for all the attributes of God that were embodied in Jesus himself, and we as the Church are called to embody—grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, self-giving, self-sacrificing. It is the central symbol of our Faith because at the same time it stands for God’s all-encompassing love and our brokenness. It stands for the end of our old self and the beginning of our new life in Christ. In the cross, all of the seeming contrasting and contradicting aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry converge. They meet just as the vertical and horizontal pieces of wood met. There the Will of God and the welfare of humankind meet. There the fear of death and the hope of eternal life meet. There the almighty creator of the universe and the frail human frame of Jesus meet.

It is on the cross that Jesus’ ministry culminates. It is the locus of his glorification. It is his *magnum opus*. It is for us the open door to heaven. It is a stumbling block for many, and the heart of the Good News for those who embrace it. It is the scandal at the center of Christianity. And it is, on this cross, at this time, with this sacrifice... It is finished.

Amen.