

Sermon Good Friday, March 30, 2018

The Rev Alexander McCurdy III

“It is finished”

I have a dear friend, rather younger than I. Brian’s his name. He’s fighting every day to extend the richness of his life, severely affected for years now by an early on-set of Parkinson’s. A gentle, kind and profound man in what he does and is: a good husband, an artist, a classical musician and composer, a writer-philosopher, a major museum art curator, a film-maker, a man who gazes deeply into the mysteries of space and the human soul; also a follower of Christ, the sign of His cross on his forehead. Brian’s first book that received nation-wide attention had a wonderful title to it, words that I think of today: *The Smile at the Heart of Things*.

Let me explain why those words occur to me on this, the sad darkest day in the Christian year, the day we remember the tortuous execution of God incarnate, of the man we know as Jesus?

“It is finished.” *What* smile at the heart of this ugly event?

“It is finished,” the last of Jesus’s 7 reported words, phrases really, from the cross.

Two other of his last utterances reported in John’s Gospel just read, have shown Jesus first, in his on-going human nature, displaying his love for his mother and especially-beloved disciple—most likely John. Yes, if there is a smile in that, it’s not much of one.

But there is no smile visible as Jesus in his second-to-last word, and with parched throat, manages to say: “I’m thirsty.” Then certainly no smile at all in his last muttered and slurred word: “It is finished.”

Oh but there *is* a big smile hidden here, the smile of an enormous earth-repairing **mission accomplished**. The hidden smile of the job done, the work wrapped up, the completion of a major component in what is called by theologians: God’s “Salvation History.” It’s all recorded in the Bible.

You see: God from before the beginning had a plan. Based utterly on his love, God had a plan to save us from the darkness which we would choose, from the things the serpent suggested and suggests we do, to save us from the evil which St. Paul spoke of doing in spite of himself. God had a plan to save us from the *scowl* we would choose instead of the smile at the heart of things.

The plan? The readings in Lent have been a mini-course in the plan, but let me sum it all up in 65 seconds.

We believe that *before* the moment the Bible describes as “the beginning,” God existed in and of Himself, at one with Himself. There was not only nothing else, but the very category of “something and nothing” didn’t exist yet. Human minds can only point to such a state of being—of no opposites.

Sometimes only astronomers, and other truly humble scientific folk—only they know how little we know and how little we *can* know of the enormity of God’s worlds. We have no mental tools in our minds which can unlock even the mysterious details of God’s pre-time and space state with no opposites yet created—no black and white; no light and dark.

But then, out of this utterly mysterious state and being of His, God creates. The opposites of “something” and “nothing” come into being. Darkness appears and God creates light to counter it. He called the light good. The darkness remained. God knew that in due time, as part of his plan, He would deal with that darkness and with the evil it could contain. God knew ahead of time—that man would abuse the freedom He had given him to choose good or evil. The apple is offered and tasted. Satan prevails in his seduction. The prince of darkness’s grim power seems great—especially today as we look at this world groaning in pain.

But, as Luther says in the third stanza of his majestic hymn: “The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him, his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure. One little word shall fell him.”

“It is finished.” That word is Jesus, the Incarnate Word which fells this prince of darkness, beginning on the cross.

And He begins the process in the style that only God espouses, facing evil in precisely the way He asks us to do. As He tells Peter to put away his sword, Jesus confronts evil and death only with the sword of submission. Dare we say love? Do his words: “It is finished” refer to his willingness to *surrender* Himself into evil’s arms in order to overcome it? Does God’s willingness to turn the other cheek to evil, to go the extra mile with it, to give it not only his cloak but the shirt off his back—doesn’t He do these things in order to triumph over it at Easter?

I think it does.

As Jesus declares “it is finished” and dies, is dead and buried and descends into the place of the dead, into the dust from which we all have come and to which we will go, He finishes in secret, the earthly part of His salvation-history plan.

At Easter then the visible and touchable evidence of God’s victory over death emerges as Jesus rises. “Come here Thomas. Put your finger into these wounds.” The final era begins right then.

And now, as we live in this *in-between* time: we wait expectantly, hopefully and faithfully for *the end* of time and the *re*-extinction of evil.

Then, Jesus standing again on earth in judgment and forgiveness—when the Kingdom of God comes on earth as it is in heaven: the plan will be completed.

So that, my dear friends, is the ultimate smile at the heart of things today on Good Friday, Christ’s embracing death and darkness, the embrace which has and will ultimately overcome it entirely.

There’s the real smile at the heart of things, to which I would only add this. My friend Brian’s latest book, and as he tells me his last, has another striking title: *I Give My Eyes*.

His eyes, I can assure you, have seen the Glory, envisioned the Glory in shades of space and time, in mud and dreams, in dirt and molecules, in tears and laughter, in beauty and dissonances, in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. His eyes are a gift to me in that vision.

Oh, and one final thing: Brian's license plate taken from the last car he could drive, now hangs on the wall in his office. *Lux Aeterna* (LUX8NA) it says, "light eternal." That's the ultimate "smile at the heart of things," especially on this Good Friday, this Best of all Fridays.

The eternal light will not only shine *in* darkness, but that light will wipe away all darkness and every tear—forever.