

Good Friday
John 18:1—19:37

“I am thirsty.”

When Jesus knew that all was finished, he said, “I am thirsty.”

It has come to this.

Four months ago the world was ablaze with a billion lights. Christmas carols droned from countless speakers, accompanying every activity from arranging flowers for the dining room table to having a tooth filled.

We all joined in the celebration, and even if we didn't get caught up in the feeding frenzy generated by the marketing departments of virtually every business in existence, we were happy to play our part in spreading the good news that Jesus Christ had been born.

After our New Year's festivities, things were quieter, for sure, but there were some who celebrated Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ as the Savior of the whole world, and not a Messiah just for a chosen people on the other side of the planet.

And now, today, it has come to this:

A tiny percentage of Christians from different traditions gathered in churches and auditoriums and even movie theaters, and the words of Jesus from the Cross, "I am thirsty."

Can we imagine the expression of any more basic human need?

It's amazing that Jesus is still conscious, or even alive.

The flogging has removed most of his skin, from the nape of his neck to the heels of his feet.

He has struggled under the weight of his Cross as he has walked from Jerusalem to Golgatha.

He has experienced excruciating, blinding pain as the nails severed nerves in his wrists and feet.

He has hung for hours in the afternoon sun with the weight of his body making it harder and harder for him to fill his lungs with air.

And now Jesus utters the words that show that he is the one who is in control.

Of all the Gospels, John's Gospel does the best job of making this so clear.

Right from the beginning, John makes it clear that Jesus is acting freely, that he is in authority, and that he alone will determine the course of these horrific events.

In John's version of the story, when the soldiers and temple police come out to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, they don't even need Judas to kiss him on the cheek.

Jesus asks, "Whom are you looking for?"

When the authorities say, "Jesus of Nazareth," Jesus responds, "I am he."

Jesus demonstrates his control throughout the last hours of his life, but nowhere does he demonstrate it more powerfully than when he says, "I am thirsty."

Jesus puts aside his choice, Jesus puts aside his divinity, and he thirsts.

He does this for us.

Will we ever begin to understand the depth of the love that enabled Jesus to do this for us?

It wasn't the nails that held Jesus on the Cross.

It was this love that kept him there.

It wasn't any sin or guilt of his that put him there.

We put Jesus on the Cross.

He was there for our sin and our guilt.

What have we offered in return?

Have we offered the gift of transformed lives, like the water changed to wine at the wedding feast in Cana?

Have we offered lives that show others the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who rested on Jesus in the Jordan River, and the same Spirit who came to each of us through the waters of Baptism?

Have we offered refreshment and renewal to the world, like the drink of water Jesus offered the Samaritan woman at the well?

Have we even bothered to offer the leftovers of our lives, like the water left in the bowl after Jesus had washed the disciples' feet?

No.

Jesus hangs on the Cross and he says, "I am thirsty," and we offer him sour wine.

Today is no time for denial or lame excuses, and it's not a time for boasting that we've been good and faithful followers.

Today is a day for owning that Jesus went to the Cross for us, and that all we have been able to offer in response is sour wine.

The last words spoken by Jesus were, "It is finished."

When he had spoken those words he laid aside his life and gave up his spirit to God.

For those of us who have come out today, and for those who were too busy to come, or too tired to come, or too frightened to come, it is not finished yet.

When Jesus spoke those words he knew that what he had been born to do was complete.

Because of the completion of his work, ours has just begun.

Lord Jesus, you had no pity on yourself, but we beg you to have mercy on us. Make our lives like the miracle of water turned to wine, like the waters of Baptism, bubbling up with the power of your Spirit, like the water from Jacob's well, refreshing and renewing the world, and help us to know that only then will you cease to thirst. Amen.