

Good Friday, 2006
“It is Finished”
by Kathy Roberts

Jesus said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. “It is finished.” Imagine what those standing there on that hill on that day might have been thinking when they heard those words. What about the Roman soldiers that were gathered there at the foot of the cross looking at the three criminals in their eyes. I think they might have thought, “Well, final one. He’s gone now. Let’s pack it up. Let’s take care of this unpleasant business and maybe get back to the garrison in time to take a nap.” Then there were those who had come out from Jerusalem, the curious, the observers. They had seen the commotion and followed along. What might they have thought when they heard those words? ...”Show’s over. Another day, another execution. Sure seems that there have been a lot of those lately. Anything else happening in Jerusalem today?” Now, imagine what those few followers of Jesus, who had actually dared to come this far must have felt when they heard those words, when they saw Jesus finally bow his head and when they literally felt the life flow out of him. “...Is this it? Is this all there is? What about the victory? What about the glory that he promised us? We expected something more. Did we not understand? He’s dead. He’s really dead. It is finished. I guess we might as well go.”

But listen more carefully. Jesus said, “IT is finished.” He did not say, “I am finished.” He did not even say, “My life is finished.” He said, IT is finished.” So there is a question for us. What is IT? Well, there is more to these words than we first understand as we hear them with our twenty-first century ears. Those listening, whether they were Jew or Gentile, would have understood them in three different ways that are not readily apparent to us. To begin with, “It is finished,” in the original Greek is just one word. And it is the word that a servant would say to the master at the end of the day. That word would mean “I have completed the work that you gave me to do.” Throughout the gospels, Jesus talks of the calling that he has to complete, finish, the work that the Father had given him. Earlier in John’s gospel, Jesus himself had said, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but to do the will of the One who sent me.” That will, the work of Jesus, was to bring a new way of living to a people who were bogged down in old and ineffective ways of trying to relate to God. The work of Jesus was to open the door into a new way of living, a new way of relating to God, as well as to each other. That old way, the Old Covenant, was the way of sacrifice, and it was finished. The new way, the New Covenant of Love, has now begun. But introducing that new way took work during the life of Jesus, on his part. We humans, and I think everybody here would agree, have a tendency in our lives to be quitters. It’s a struggle that we have on a regular basis. When I left home this morning to come here, I left a pile of unfinished laundry. I left an unfinished letter. We have an unfinished car in our garage that is sitting on blocks for I have given up counting how many years it has been.

How many have a little unfinished construction project in their homes, unfinished photo albums. I won't even ask for a show of hands on that. Anybody here (I would like to know who you are.) has ever finished a diet? That just goes to show. We don't finish the things that we start and sometimes, in the busy-ness of our lives, we find it hard to even finish a thought.

The Scripture says that Jesus was like us in all ways, even in the ways that he was tempted. And I think he had to have been tempted at times to just give up, especially considering the material that he often had to work with. Story after story in the gospel tells us how difficult a time he had with the disciples, getting them on the same page as he was. But Jesus was no quitter. He didn't give in to that temptation. He did what he had been sent to do, and that was to heal, to teach, to forgive, to reach out, to love. And who did he love? He loved the sinner. He loved those who were forgotten. He loved the outcast. He loved the lost people. Well, in our human-ness, I know that we often feel like quitting. And yet, we do know that the work that God has asked of us is still unfinished. And I think that hearing those words of Jesus today should give us the courage to pray for God's guidance as we pick up every single day of our lives, the tasks that he has given us to do in his name. And we pray also that we will have the strength to see them through to the finish as Jesus did.