

Isaiah prophesied that it would be like this: a time of silence. Not because there would be no one around to speak, but because no one would know what to say. “Many were astonished at you,” Isaiah said. “His appearance was so damaged, he did not look like a man.” The suffering of Jesus was something that took your breath away.

He hangs there on the cross, between two worlds. He hangs above a world that does not want him, and below the heavens that reject Him, as He endures His Father’s wrath against sin. And He does this for every thoughtless word, for every broken promise, for every greedy grab, for placing yourself before others and things before God. For all this, Jesus dies. It’s the only way. Here is God’s last and final judgment upon everything that is wrong with humanity—everything with me; with you.

It isn’t easy to think about; much less visualize. In the beginning of the world, God made Adam and Eve in His image; but here, at the end of the ministry of Jesus, God made His son in our image, but not in terms of physical appearance. Jesus looks like us in our sin. This is what it looks like to get what you deserve for everything you’ve ever done wrong. That’s what we see suspended from the cross, and it’s more than enough to knock the smirk off your face and the pride out of your heart.

Isaiah was right. The world is struck silent. The horror of sin; the justice of God; the Suffering Servant on the cross; it’s overwhelming. No one knows what to say. Yet into that silence, one voice does speak. It’s a human voice, but it’s also more than human. Before He dies, Jesus opens His mouth, and he has something to say.

Way back when God created Adam and Eve, he used His breath. God breathed into Adam’s nostrils and he became a living creature. In the beginning, God was the source of life-giving breath. Now, at the end of the life of Jesus, watch as God uses His dying breath. Jesus breaks the silence and says one word: “Tetelestai.” A merchant’s word. A word that one would write at the bottom of an account that had been paid in full. He wants us to know that we have come to the end. It is finished. Lest there be any doubt or confusion, Jesus announces that He just paid off the debt you owed His Father. It is all, completely gone. Because “Tetelestai” is true—your sin debt has been paid off in full—there is a new life that opens up before you.

Some time ago, a young man bought a DVD of a movie he knew he would never watch again. The movie was “The Passion of the Christ.” For him, seeing it in the theater was an ordeal, because it was so violent and so graphic. He knew he would never watch the whole thing again, but he bought the DVD for one scene—a scene that played over and over in his mind.

It’s the moment when Jesus speaks to his mother Mary on the way to the crucifixion. Jesus is bloodied and beaten. He is carrying his cross through the crowded streets of Jerusalem. He falls for the third time, and Mary reaches out as if to catch him. Her mind is filled with images from the past. She remembers him running to her as a child in the streets of Nazareth.

These images of the past only make the present more painful. She realizes that this time she cannot catch him. This day, her Son is going to die.

But when Mary reaches out to Jesus, Jesus stops and reaches out to her. He catches her heart with a word. His face is bruised and bloodied, and behind his head is the cross, but he says, “Behold, I make all things new.” When Mary’s mind is filled with images of the past, Jesus offers her a promise of the future. When Mary’s heart is breaking over the end, Jesus comforts her with a new beginning. Now, it must be said that this exchange didn’t take place in Scripture—Jesus speaks these words in Revelation 21, not on the path to the cross—but the scene captures the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ death in a way that is absolutely right. The death of Jesus is indeed the beginning of a new creation.

Today, around the world, God gathers His people, as things seem to be falling apart, and He offers us hope. Hope of a new thing that is slowly coming together, a promise growing and coming to fruition. Hope of the Day when Jesus will return, to judge the living and the dead. This crucified one is King and Lord of all, and we who trust in him, who hold on to this bruised and beaten Jesus, will be brought into a glorious new creation. But new things are already blossoming now; faith, hope, and love are blooming, because Jesus has finished His work.

At the end of John’s gospel, he recorded a time when there was silence. No words could express the suffering of Jesus. No words could get him down from the cross. He hangs there, dying. But in His dying, with the breath he has left, he speaks one word, “Tetelestai,” and with that word, God begins creating once again. With that word, Jesus says, ‘let there be payment for all sins.’ Will you allow Jesus to pay your debt? Will you allow Him to create something new in you?

*Calvary’s mournful mountain climb; There adoring at [Jesus’] feet,*

*Mark that miracle of time, God’s own sacrifice complete.*

*“It is finished!” hear him cry; learn of Jesus Christ to die.*

*-James Montgomery, 1771—1854 “Go to Dark Gethsemane”*

Good Friday + March 30, 2018

St. Mark Lutheran Church

Pastor Mark Matzke