



**Mennonite  
Church  
Canada**

Resource Centre

## **Sermon**

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## **“They Crucified Him”**

*Scripture: John 19:17-18*

“They crucified him...” these three words are the climax of the earthly life of Jesus. They are the climax of an amazing love story, the story of God coming among us to save, to rescue, to provide new life.

“They crucified him” - with these three words the Christian faith separates itself from all other religions of the world.

Christianity alone dares to proclaim a crucified God. No other faith proclaims a Savior who died a criminal’s death.

“They crucified him” -and they thought that it was over, what Jesus had come to do on earth was a failure.

Isn’t that what Pilate thought ?...

Pilate the Roman governor who was in charge of these messy crucifixions. We don’t know how he handled these situations, but for this one he added a touch of humor, sick humor to the event. He had an inscription placed above his head, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” this beaten and bruised, bleeding creature on the cross is a king!

Just look at him! He is the king of the Jews.

This is what happens to anyone who forgets who the real ruler around here is. And he took the trouble to have it in three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

No one should miss the point - King Jesus is finished! It’s over! (thanks to Ken Gible for the phrase, “It’s not over.”)

Isn’t that what the Jewish religious leaders thought? The scribes and the Pharisees, the religious elite had been disturbed by this itinerant preacher-healer from Nazareth.

He was upsetting their system of controlling the masses. He embarrassed them week after week. He challenged them on key issues. And so, they engineered his end and they thought they had won.

Isn’t that what even Mary his mother must have thought? She must have felt it in her heart, this is it, its over.

This is Mary’s second appearance in the gospel of John. She was there at the wedding of Cana, at the beginning and now she was there again.

Now she saw that her son was being cut down in the prime of life. She had prayed for him and worried for him, and now as she saw him dying on that cross, she was sure this is it, it’s over.

Isn’t that what the disciples must have feared? This is it, it’s over! Luke even reports them saying to each other, “we had hoped he would save Israel” - did you hear what they said, we had hoped, but we hope no more.

It’s over! We’re going back to fishing.

All their hopes and dreams were shattered. Gone were the opportunities to hear his remarkable teaching; gone were the signs of compassion for the outcast and the sinners.

Peter, the one he had nick-named the rock, the one who had failed him miserably was sure it was over. No chance to get forgiveness from the one he had betrayed. No chance for the relationship to be restored. As far as the disciples were concerned, it was really over.

But everyone who thought that with his crucifixion it was over and done with, ended for good - everyone of them - those who wished and hoped it were really over, those who feared it was over - all of them were wrong. Totally wrong!

They were wrong because on Easter morning, the whole bloody mess was reversed. They believed that everyone who died on a cross was cursed by God, but this time, God gave his stamp of approval, his blessing on the Jesus-project.

They were wrong because even in dying **Jesus dared to speak**. And he did not speak as one whose final end had come. He spoke as one whose time had come, as one who dared to believe that truth prevails, that love conquers, that forgiveness is the answer to sin and failure.

He spoke as one who believed that truth, love and forgiveness would continue to be effective in the face of human rebellion and sin because they were rooted in God.

We know that Jesus spoke seven very meaningful words from the cross - seven times he uttered words that rose out of the depth of his soul; seven times he spoke words of compassion and concern, forgiveness and commitment.

Here's what he said that day:

- Father forgive them for they know not what they do
- Today you will be with me in paradise
- Mother, your son; son, your mother
- My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
- I thirst
- It is finished!
- Father into thy hands I commit my spirit.

But in reality, **Jesus said even more** much more than these amazing words could say. He said something to the world, to all humanity - without using another word. It's what we read between the lines, it's what we sense - even through the taunting of the onlookers and the weeping of his friends, we sense this silent message.

Even though darkness covered the earth at the time of his death, the darkness was pierced with a shaft of light.

And the light communicated! What is it that Jesus said without saying another word? What Jesus was saying without speaking and what we are celebrating here this morning is grace, amazing grace!

In his book, "What's so amazing about grace?" Philip Yancey says: "Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more - no amount of spiritual calisthenics and renunciations, no amount of knowledge gained from seminaries and divinity schools, no amount of crusading on behalf of righteous causes. And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less."

In addition to everything else that Good Friday means, it reminds us that God is gracious, forgiving and inviting.

God is the giver, grace is the gift. And the cross is the price of this costly grace.

**What Pilate** thought was finally over, was not over at all. It was but the beginning of a flood of grace into the whole world.

**What Jewish leaders** hoped was over and done with, finally gone from the landscape of Palestine I mean this fresh wind of God's spirit that changed everything and everyone who was open to it - they hoped Jesus of Nazareth would finally be silenced by the cross, but he was not silenced and it was not over. The wind of God's spirit continued to blow - and they could do nothing about it.

**What the others**, I mean Mary and the disciples, and all those who had heard his teaching and felt his healing, what they all feared - that he would be forever silenced and removed from the scene - that it was over, was in fact not over.

For the death of Jesus was not the end of Jesus. The death of Jesus was the clearest expression of something that you and I will never figure out.

From the cross God's grace is whispered for all to hear. No, from the cross grace is shouted for all to hear. The death of Jesus set's God's grace loose in the world. The unspoken message of Calvary invites us all to believe, to worship, to allow our lives to be transformed by grace, bit by bit, to get involved in the life-long process of "being conformed to the likeness of Christ" as Paul wrote about it some years later.

As we come to the Lord's table today, let us rejoice in this amazing grace of God.

Let us leave the table committed to living our lives in response to grace!