

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus said, "It is finished." And then he gave up his Spirit.

We could not save ourselves from sin and death. We cannot save ourselves from sin and death. But, oh! what it cost Jesus to save us. Jesus, the very source of the water of life cried out, "I thirst!" He had completely poured himself out for you and me and for the whole world. "It is finished!" He had accomplished what he was born on this earth to do. But at such a cost! Giving his life, Jesus has saved the world.

You and I know this. We believe it! We stake our lives on it! Our faith is what can get us through the toughest of times – through suffering, disappointments, the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune!" Where would we be without our faith in Jesus? Where would we be without the hope we have in Him who lives with death behind him and promises to be with us always even into eternity?

In tonight's liturgy we pray for those who do not believe in Jesus, and for those who do not believe in God. We pray for those who do not know how much they are loved by our Creator. For those who do not know how precious they are in the eyes of the One who laid down His life for them!

Jesus has accomplished our salvation and theirs. Now it's up to us to share this incredibly great news with every man, woman, and child. We are not meant to keep it to ourselves! It's too important! It's life-giving! It is the Word of love which the whole world needs to hear and receive.

In the two thousand years since Jesus died on the cross and then – miracle of miracles – rose to life again that first Easter, faith in him has spread to every part of the world. If you stop and think about that, it really is an amazing thing. Especially when you remember who those first disciples were – those twelve, one of whom betrayed Jesus; one who denied him three times; and all the rest who forsook him and fled. They were an uneducated lot, fishermen and such. They were not rabbis or priests, intellectuals, or theologians. And yet somehow after Jesus rose from the dead, that motley crew managed to become preachers and evangelists – they were the apostles that Jesus commissioned, and the Holy Spirit sent to proclaim the news about Jesus's death and resurrection to the ends of the earth.

The amazing thing is their message took hold and spread wherever they went. The message that a particular man named Jesus died on a cross out of love for every man, woman and child who ever lived, and who now lives again to be the Lord and Savior of all people everywhere – that message took hold of people’s hearts, everywhere. And it continues to take hold of people’s hearts to this day.

Believe it or not, even though the gospel message has spread to every corner of the earth, there are still many people in this world who have never heard about Jesus. In the mission world they are called “unreached people groups.” According to some statistics, there are over seven thousand unreached people groups in the world, comprising about 42% of the world’s population. That’s a lot of people! That’s a huge mission field!

And so, the mission work of the Apostles is not done for there are many people in this world who do not know about Jesus or about the God who “...so loved the world that he sent his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) They have never heard of a God who loves us all so much that he was even willing to offer up his own Son as a sacrifice for us, that we might have life, abundantly and eternally.

Now, imagine that you are hearing the story of Jesus’s death and resurrection for the very first time if you can. This might be hard for us to do. How can we put ourselves into the mindset of someone who has never heard about Jesus or never been told the stories of the Bible?

I was raised in the church and have known that “Jesus loves me, this I know...” since I was a child, so it is hard for me to imagine what it would be like to hear this good news for the first time.

And yet, we may all have had a moment when the “penny dropped” and the gospel message sunk in, or it hit us in a new and powerful way. It could have happened at a particularly challenging time in our life when we were searching for meaning and answers to the difficult questions of life. Or during some kind of “mountaintop” experience. Or maybe it happened when we were reading a story in the Bible that suddenly grabbed us in a personal and powerful way. But I daresay most of us have grown up in a culture where knowledge of Jesus and his church is readily available to us so it’s hard to imagine what it would be like to hear the story of Jesus for the first time.

But there are places and peoples in our world who have never encountered Jesus or the Word of God. That’s why I want to tell you a story about a

ministry called Theovision. I learned about Theovision during my recent trip to Africa. Essentially, what they do at Theovision is record the Bible in the native language of people who have had no access to the Word of God and don't know anything about Jesus. Some of these people groups in Africa are nomadic tribes that move around from place to place. Because of their nomadic way of life, they don't have schools and so they don't know how to read or write. Their language is entirely oral, and their communication style is storytelling.

The folks at Theovision record the Bible, beginning with the New Testament, in the heart language of these nomadic tribes. They record the scriptures on small handheld devices called "proclaimers." Small solar panels are on the back so that they can be charged by the sun. Listening groups are formed and Bible studies are used to teach the people how to use the proclaimers. They listen together and talk about the meaning of the stories they are hearing.

Usually, it's the women who gather to hear the stories at first. Then the older men become interested and want to know more about Jesus. One of these older men, I was told, was moved to ask with amazement:

"Who is this man Jesus who knows so much about me?"

"Who is this man who loves me so much that he was willing to die for me?"

Indeed, we could all ask the same questions. Who is this man Jesus who loves us so much that he was willing to suffer and die such a horrible death for you and for me? Who is this Father who would send His Son to die for us? Who is this Man who gave up his Spirit and breathed His last for our sake? Who is this Man who, "has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;" who "was wounded for our transgressions; and crushed for our iniquities?"

Who is this man Jesus who, even as he was wracked with unspeakable pain and could barely breathe as he hung there on the cross, somehow gathered up his strength to tell the thief on the cross next to him, "Today, you will be with me in paradise!"

Who is this Jesus who looked with pity upon those who crucified him and said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?"

Who is this Jesus who cried out from the cross in utter abandonment, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"

What wondrous love is this! O my soul! What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul?

This is a man whose love is far beyond our ability to comprehend! This is a man whose love is stronger than death! This is a man whose love could withstand even a sense of complete abandonment and rejection. Can you imagine love like that?

Earlier this week, our Bishop, Bishop Dan, gave a devotion in which he said that the closest he can get to the love of Jesus for all humanity is his own love for his family. Maybe we can all go that far. We love our spouses, our children and our grandchildren with a love that bears all things. Maybe we can even say that we love them so much that we would be willing to die for them if we had to.

But then what? What about our friends and our neighbors? What about those who are on the opposite side of the political spectrum? What about people who don't look like us? What about our enemies? What about people on the other side of the world? What about those seven thousand unreached people groups? Does our love reach that far?

Ours doesn't but God's love does. Jesus's love extends all the way around the world to every man, woman, and child. He gave his life for each and every one, including you and me. What wondrous love is this!

In John's gospel, chapter 12, Jesus told his disciples that when he was lifted up (on the cross), he would draw all people to himself. This is Jesus's mission, and he will not rest until every man, woman, and child knows his love.

We are privileged to be invited to join him in this mission. Let us pray for those who work in the mission field and support their work however we can.

May this amazing and wondrous love of our Lord Jesus so fill us up that it overflows and floods the whole world so that all men, women, and children everywhere may know the incredible love of Jesus, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen