

Year A Easter 7 My Work on Earth is Finished John 17 vv1 to 11

“I have glorified you by finishing the work that you gave me to do.” These words of Jesus, spoken to his Father in prayer, really caught my attention. Jesus’ work is *finished*? I look around and I see so much wrongness in the world, so much brokenness in the world, and I think to myself, “How can Jesus say to God that his work is finished?”

What makes this statement even more puzzling, is that Jesus is saying these words to his disciples at their last supper together – *before* he was crucified. Moments before we hear Jesus speak this prayer in today’s gospel story, Jesus has declared to his disciples, “Take courage. I have conquered the world!”

Not “I *will* conquer” ... “I *have* conquered.” Not “I *will* finish my work” ... “I *have* finished my work.” What did Jesus finish? How did he conquer the world before he was crucified and risen? We need to figure this out. Let’s hit the “Stop” button and go back to the beginning.

Jesus was sent by the Father into the world to fulfill God’s purpose. What is God’s purpose? God created the world and all that is in it, God created *us*, to be in perfect relationship with him – to love as God loves, to be perfect as God is perfect, to know God completely and to be known completely by God.

Most of us are a long way from this perfect relationship of love with God and others and creation. Much of humanity seems to have forgotten God. Many have decided we don’t need God...we can be great on our own. When we turn from God and do our own thing, we do not – and cannot – create with nothing but love and goodness as God can and does. We create human power structures. In human power structures, the people that are the “have nots” depend on those who “have.” The human idea of

those who “have”, that is, the ones with the power, are the ones with “position.” Those who have power are those with “property.” Those who have power are the ones with big “pocketbooks.” I say this often because it is so very important to be aware of: Position, property, pocketbook...those are the ones with the human version of power.

When you have people living according to human power structures – with the “haves” with the power and the “have nots” who are powerless – you have injustice, you have oppression, you have abuse, you have violence. You have, in short, a broken world filled with broken people. This is the world of “empire.”

God has worked throughout history, and is working, to get things on the right track again. God brought his people out of Egypt – away from the empire of Pharaoh. God brought them out of Egypt to live according to *God’s* power structure, to live in a counter-cultural community that did *not* follow the broken and corrupt ways of the world. We were given the 10 commandments – how to live in right relationship with God, and how to live in right relationship with each other. We were given the rest of the laws – laws meant to safeguard God’s way of living in equality with one another – where the weakest in society (the widow, the orphan, the foreigner) were cared for by the stronger. The Sabbath, the Sabbath Year, and the Sabbath Jubilee – a seven day, seven year, seven x seven year rhythm of giving back was established by God so that no one could amass great wealth and power while the poor became poorer.

Despite being personally rescued by God, brought out from slavery in Egypt to freedom in personal relationship with God in the Promised Land, humanity messed that up. They ignored God’s rules, they reverted back to the world’s version of power. The people even ignored the fact that God was their king and they set up their own king, they set up their own worldly kingdom instead of living in God’s kingdom...and

the people with position, with property, and with pocketbooks grew more and more powerful, shunning the weak, oppressing the poor, banning the sick from their communities...And into *this* world came Jesus.

Into this world of empire came Jesus. He came to open our eyes once again to *God's* power. Into the corrupt kingdoms of the world, he brought *God's* kingdom. Jesus lived his life according to the rules of God's kingdom. Those rules, Jesus said, are simple. As we heard last week, you must love God with all your being and you must love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus healed the sick who had been pushed out of the community. Jesus feasted with the weak who had been shunned. Jesus loved the poor who had been oppressed by their more powerful neighbours. At every step of the way, Jesus rejected the power and authority of the world and at every step of the way, the authorities and powers of the world fought back because *their* power rested on the backs of the ones Jesus was lifting up. Jesus was revealing God's kingdom to them – a kingdom in which everyone lived in perfect communion with God. Jesus threatened the very way of existence for the powerful of this world because in God's kingdom, their power would be gone.

“I have conquered the world,” Jesus said. “My work that you gave me is finished. You have given me authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given to me. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Jesus now had a core group of followers who had witnessed this. They had seen Jesus living the way of God's kingdom. They had seen that living God's way meant living in a counter-cultural community, a community that did not live the way of the world. They had witnessed Jesus' perfect love and his perfect relationship with God. They said to Jesus, “Now we understand – now we believe that you came from God” and in

reply Jesus says, "I have conquered the world!" Jesus knew this rag-tag bunch of disciples would reject the power structures of the world, they would live in God's alternative community, and they would spread this good news to the rest of the known world despite being persecuted for it.

I have conquered the world, Jesus said. Eternal life is to know God through Jesus, to be in perfect relationship with him, living his way of love in the midst of a world that rejected this for their own power. And the disciples finally got it. "My work you have given me is finished," Jesus said with confidence and he went to the cross.

Jesus assured the success of his disciples with his ultimate victory over the corrupted powers of the world. The cross, N.T. Wright says, is the victory of weakness over strength, the victory of love over hatred. It was the victory that consisted in Jesus' allowing evil to do its worst to him and never attempting to fight it on its own terms. When the power of evil had made its last possible move, Jesus had still not been beaten by it."

In Jesus we see perfect humanity – the image of God, the way God intends us to be. Jesus gave his life in love to defeat the corrupted powers of this world. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. "Sacrifice" comes from the Latin *sacrum facere* – to make holy. Jesus made it possible for a sinful people, a sinful world to be made holy and to draw near to God, to be in perfect communion with God. Two thousand years ago, the disciples began issuing the invitations to join in that communion, to draw near to God...Come, be baptized they said. We are all invited to live that new life through our baptisms following Jesus through death into his resurrection and into a life in *God's* kingdom – not the kingdoms of the world. Jesus calls us out of Egypt, away from empire, to live in God's alternative community.

However, we all know that history has a tendency to repeat itself. Despite being personally rescued by God in Jesus Christ, brought out from slavery to the world's power structures into freedom in personal relationship with God in God's kingdom, humanity is messing that up. Many ignore God's rules, many have reverted back to the world's version of power. Many ignore the fact that God is our king and pay homage to the richness of the world instead of living in God's kingdom...and the people with position, with property, and with pocketbooks grow more and more powerful, shunning the weak, oppressing the poor, banning the sick from their communities...And into *this* world Jesus is made present through us. History is doomed to repeat itself unless we remember. We must remember God's history of salvation. We must remember Jesus' way of life and why he was brutally put to death so that his death was not in vain. We must show to the world and tell the world that there is a better way of being and doing and it is God's way...God's way of nothing but love. We must be nothing but love for this power hungry, greedy world revolving around money. We must be nothing but love for the mean people, for the broken people, for the misguided people. Betrayed and forsaken we must overcome hatred with love. Together, we are Christ for this world – overcoming our imperfections through the many and varied gifts we bring to the world as a body. Our remembering begins here, each week in the Holy Eucharist when we share the bread and wine. We share Christ's body given to Christ's body so that we may be that body, renewed and remembering, in the world, for the sake of the world.

"I have conquered the world," Jesus says. "My work you have given me is finished."
Our work has begun.