

“IT IS FINISHED”

The Rev. Mr. Jeffrey Monroe, Curate

His ministry had begun just three years earlier. What he was going through now began only last night. The time of sharing his last supper with his disciples had just happened, now He was hanging on the cross. In the early morning hours of this day, he was dragged to the courtyard and tied to a post. Here he waited, the sentence of death hanging over his head. But first, it was to begin with him being flogged.

Flogging was the legal preliminary to *every* Roman execution. The usual *instrument of choice* was a short whip brandishing several single or braided leather thongs of variable lengths. Iron balls and sharp pieces of sheep bone were tied at intervals. For His scourging, Jesus, like all others marked for a cross, was stripped of His clothing...His hands were then tied to an upright post...His Body extended back...as far as It would go. His back...buttocks...and legs were flogged by two soldiers (one on either side)...The pounding of the iron balls on His Body caused deep contusions...As the flogging continued, the leather thongs inflicted deeper and deeper lacerations...cutting into the underlying skeletal muscles...*striped* lacerations appeared...producing quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh...and a substantial loss of blood.

The severity of the scourging was intended to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse and death...a condition in which he might remain cognizant of the punishments that lie ahead. This presented a bloody...haunting...gruesome figure for the upcoming *Death March*.

"The soldiers went up to Jesus...They put their faces to His... struck Him... spit on Him...They humiliated Him...They put a scarlet robe on Jesus...twisted some thorns into a mock crown...and then pushed it deep into His skull...They forced a wooden staff into His hands...a fake scepter...Our Lord's tormentors knelt before Him... 'Hail, O King of the Jews! Hail King of the Jews!'"

Jesus carried His Own Cross-bar from the flogging post to the site of His crucifixion...just outside of the city walls. This was the custom of the day...the condemned man, suffering disgrace heaped upon humiliation...tortured and considered to be less than human. Usually, the outstretched arms of the prisoner were tied to a heavy wooden cross bar, the short part of the cross, called the patibulum.

Since the weight of the entire cross weighed well over 300 pounds, usually only the cross-bar was carried by the condemned man. The patibulum alone, weighing approximately 150 to 175 lbs. was placed across the nape of the criminal's neck...balanced along both shoulders. We know that our Lord, critically weakened from brutal torture, fell while attempting to balance the weight.

The *Procession* to the site of the Skull was led by a full military compliment...steered through the crowds by a ranking centurion. A sole drummer followed the convicted man, beating out a haunting rhythm. He was followed by a Roman soldier who carried a sign that bore the condemned man's name...and the charge of his capital crime...In Jesus' case,

"Pilate had prepared a notice to be fastened to the Cross. Called the titulus, it read: JESUS OF NAZARETH-THE KING OF THE JEWS. The sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews had protested to Pilate, 'Do not write The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews' "Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written.'"

"The crowd kept shouting, 'Crucify Him! Crucify Him!'..."

These were the same people He had loved, had healed, had cast demons from, had fed. These were the same people who listen to His words of peace, love and hope. Now these same people rejected Him and cursed Him-mocked him as he dragged himself to Calvary.

At the site of His execution, Jesus was offered a blend of wine and gall...After tasting this bitter elixir, He refused to drink. The soldiers ripped the robe from His Body...reopening the flogging wounds...then threw Him to the ground...His arms were outstretched...still tied to the patibulum...a soldier would place his foot against the cross and pull His arms taught.

He lay facing His Father in Heaven...without protest. The ropes that had rubbed His hands until they bled, were removed...Tapered iron spikes approximately 5 to 7 inches long with a square shaft, 3/8 of an inch across, were carefully driven through His wrists...between the bones of His hands, so that the bones would not be fractured...so that the spikes would hold His Body in place with the aid of wooden washers. After both arms were fixed to the crossbar, it was lifted up and set atop the stipe...the tall post that held up the body and formed the long part of the cross.

Next Jesus' feet were nailed to the front of the standing post...To accomplish this His knees were turned to the side, and then bent. When the nailing was completed the titulus, bearing His name and describing the disposition of His crime, was attached just above His head. *"THIS IS JESUS- THE KING OF THE JEWS."*

Jesus was crucified...along with two convicted murderers...one on His right and one on His left...Many people stood watching that day...For some it was just another day's outing...entertainment...They brought refreshments. Watching a crucifixion to its logical conclusion could be an all-day affair. Many of the common folk, and the majority of the ruling class...derided Him...*"If you are the King of the Jews save yourself."* His Mother and His Beloved Disciple John...His Mother's sister...and Mary from Magdala stood near the Cross. We can only imagine their grief and sorrow...their pain. Here was the One they loved more than life itself. What could the blessed mother of Jesus have felt? What mother, or father, is not in great pain when they watch their child suffering?

Roman torture was designed to make a victim's end slow and agonizing...as bloody a spectacle as possible. Blood flowed freely from Jesus' wounds...especially from the *Crown of Thorns* pushed deep into His skull. With each painful raising of His Body to exhale...at each gasp for air, His flesh tore again and again on the rough wooden cross scraping against His back...Medical science today confirms that the weight of Jesus' Body pulling down on His outstretched arms and shoulders...coupled with the continuous

loss of blood brought on intense muscle spasms and cramps...making just simple respiration excruciating.

"Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world."

Jesus had carried His Own Cross-bar from the flogging post to the site of His crucifixion just outside of the city walls...step by bloody step.

No man made Jesus walk that walk...No man could put Jesus on a Cross...No man would have been able to bind Him to a Cross if the power to do so had not been given from above.

God demanded a *Perfect Sacrifice...a Spotless Lamb...and thus it was God's Own Son that willingly ascended a Cross of Death that was to become the royal Throne of Life!*

As he hung there for us, all that was to be-was fulfilled. The blood that ran down the cross and mingled in the dirt from his dying body stained the earth. His torn flesh hung from his body, the pain beyond anything we could imagine. This most agonizing of death, this humiliation, this horrible scene-why?

For us. For here in this moment all that was needed to make us his own was accomplished. All that was required for our salvation was completed, all that was due for our debts was paid.

“It is finished”

Based on an original sermon by the Rev. Edward Balfour