

WGUMC June 29, 2014 John 19:25b-30
"suffered under Pontius Pilate...buried"

You know the old joke: how do we know that Jesus was a woman? 1. He had to feed a crowd at a moment's notice. 2. He kept trying to get his message across to a bunch of men and they didn't get it. 3. Even when he was dead, he had to get up because there was more work to do.

You moms out there know what I mean. The work is never finished. When Jesus died, he left a lot of work undone. There were folks he didn't reach, lessons he didn't teach, hurts he didn't heal, souls he didn't save. His "to do" list was almost as long at the end of his life as it was at the beginning. Yet on the cross he said, "It is finished."

That's something that's really hard for the rest of us to say. For the over-achievers among us, it's difficult to say about anything, "I've done all I can do." For the control freaks, it almost kills us to say, "Someone else will have to take it from here." Because no one can do it quite like we can. And if we think that's true for us, how

much more true for Jesus! Still, he had the wisdom to say, "It is finished." No, all the work didn't get done, but his grace is sufficient for everyone.

You could say that the story of Jesus is a story about living with limits. The amazing thing is that, unlike the rest of us, Jesus freely accepted them. Philippians says, "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." In other words, Christ "emptied himself" of his God life and took on human life with all of its limitations. God in Jesus knew hunger, thirst, and weariness. God in Jesus knew rejection, hostility, and homelessness. God in Jesus knew pain, suffering and loneliness. And he chose to live here anyway. "And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." [Philippians 2:6-8]

Then Paul had the nerve to say, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" [Philippians 2:5], when we don't want to live with those limits! Especially not the death. Cross or no cross, death is the ultimate limitation, and we are even more loath to say that our life is finished than we are to say that this job is finished or this marriage is finished. If you doubt me, just look at how we approach end-of-life care in this country. Kaiser Health News reports that Medicare spent \$554 billion in 2011, and 28% of that cost (\$170 billion) went to care for people in the last six months of their lives. Though more folks are using hospice care now, too many people are still being hospitalized and put through high-cost, high-risk procedures in the last days of life. It's a high price to pay for our unwillingness to say, "It is finished."

But death isn't the only limit we have to live with. There are lots of others that we are born with. We come into this world with a whole set of givens we didn't choose and couldn't give away if we wanted to: the social class and skin color and education level of our

parents, the caliber of our schools, the job opportunities in our community, the fairness of our political and legal systems, the health of the ecosystem. To a much larger extent than we like to admit, our lives are shaped by limitations.

But it's almost un-American to talk about limits. We were brought up to believe that we live in a land without them. Try hard enough and we can do anything we want to do (except find affordable housing). But even if we buy into that belief—that we can be anything we want to be—we can't be *everything* we want to be.

Life is making choices, but that's just another way of saying, life is about accepting our limits. Because you see, every time you make a decision, you are limiting your options. I remember growing up and wanting to live so many different lives. At different times, I wanted to sing like Julie Andrews, ride horses like the Man from Snowy River, be a country vet like James Herriot, a medical missionary like Albert Schweitzer, a preacher like Harry Emerson Fosdick, and a peacemaker like Archbishop Desmond Tutu. I don't

have any of those talents, but even if I had all of them, I still couldn't live all those lives. Writer Sam Keen puts it this way:

There are so many lives I want to live, so many styles I would like to inhabit...I am so many, yet I may be only one. I mourn for all the selves I kill when I decide to be a single person.
[Quoted in William Sloane Coffin's *The Courage to Love*]

As we grow up (if we grow up), we discover that there's a grief that comes along with having to limit ourselves to one life. But therein lies the glory. When we stop trying to live all those other lives, and accept our own life, like Jesus, we can finally begin to live.

After 40 days in the wilderness, the devil told Jesus that he didn't have to accept his limits. He didn't have to be hungry. He could turn stones into bread. He didn't have to suffer and die. Even if he jumped off the top of the temple, the angels would save him. He didn't have to be despised and rejected by the world. He could worship the devil and rule the world.

But Jesus knew that he could only live one life: his own. So, accepting those limits, he lived right up to them—"to the point of

death, even death on a cross." Irenaeus, one of the early leaders of the church, says "the glory of God is a human being fully alive." And that was Jesus. Even on the cross, he was fully alive, fully embracing every moment of his mortal life. He lived life to its fullest despite the limits that being in the flesh had put on him. And if we would be his followers, we must do the same.

For all of us, our resources are limited. So, if we want to live fully, we have to make hard choices about how we use them.

Hanging on the cross, Jesus had run out of time and energy, but then he looked down at his grief-stricken mother and wondered who would care for her? How would she survive? Supporting his mom in her old age was one task he couldn't finish. But Jesus accepted this limitation. Speaking of his beloved disciple standing there with her, he said to Mary: "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple: "Here is your mother." He knew that couldn't be her son any longer, so he left the task to someone else.

Sometimes, we have to do that, too. When you leave a job, you may work hard to tie up the loose ends, but eventually you come to a point where you need to say, "It is finished," even when it's not, so you can leave it for the next guy. It's the same when you leave a relationship, even when not everything that needs to be forgiven is forgiven, because we need to move out and make room for the grace of God to move in and complete the work, even if it takes lots of years and lots of tears.

We learn as we get older: the sooner we accept our limitations, the fuller and happier our lives will be. Look at David Forderer. He worships here, but he's a member of Los Altos UMC and one of their lay members of Annual Conference. When I got off the train a week ago Wednesday in Burlingame, there was David on the platform in his wheelchair. I rode with him in the taxi to the Hyatt for our meeting. Serving on the Governor's Commission on Disabilities, going to meetings in San Francisco and Sacramento, being a member of our Board of Trustees, David is more mobile than most of us. His life

tells us: accept your limits, but then don't be afraid to live right up to them.

I'm afraid too many of us are waiting around for better options. Our Vacation Bible School had a Sues theme this year, and one of my favorite Dr. Sues books has a page for people who are just waiting:

Waiting for a train to go
or a bus to come, or a plane to go
or the mail to come, or the rain to go
or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow
or waiting around for a Yes or No
or waiting for their hair to grow.
Everyone is just waiting.

But life is too limited to waste any of it just waiting. You may not believe it, but you are already the better option that you are waiting for. All you have to do is embrace who you are and you can live right up to the limit of the life God has promised you. In fact, we don't really find our true limits until we try to live up to them. And if you do, I can promise you that, along the way, you will run out of time and energy. Like Jesus on the cross, you will get thirsty. And

before you get there, you will want to say, "It is finished." But hold on and look ahead, my friends. See what happens at the finish line. Christ rises from the dead, surpassing the limits of this life, so that we may one day, too. If we can believe that, our own limitations will not be so limiting.

Yes, we all have limits, even Jesus. But God in Jesus accepted our limited life so that we could come to know and accept God's unlimited love. There is no limit on what God can do in and through us, and in Christ every one of God's promises is a "Yes."

[2 Corinthians 1:20].

So we say "Yes" to Jesus the Christ, God's Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. And his story and our story are not yet finished.

#882 Apostles' Creed