

The 7th Word: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Good Friday Ecumenical Service - April 10, 2009
First Presbyterian Church of Colorado Springs
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The Gospel According to Luke, the 23rd chapter, verses 44 through 46:
“It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last.”

I.

The last word. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. And then, having said this, he breathed his last. What else is there to say once the last word has been spoken? Shall we not just abide here, mute, with all words stolen from us?

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. And then, having said this, he breathed his last.

If we dare not go forward, perhaps we can take one step backward and listen. Before his last word, a strange light and a sound, a destructive and mournful sound. The curtain of the temple, the human-constructed veil between heaven and earth, torn in two. In Luke’s gospel, creation itself aches with grief. The light of the sun fails, as in an eclipse, and darkness falls upon the earth. Jesus’ death, for Luke, has cosmic consequences. In what should be the bright of day, a grey murk, a failure of light, a blanket of sorrow. Creation falls silent. Then, a loud cry: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” His last words, verse 5 from Psalm 31.

Why would his last word be a quote from scripture? Why would the Lord, whose very words became scripture, not speak something original, poetic, and inspiring? A final assurance, explanation, vindication for those of us who are onlookers. The truth is that Jesus was a person steeped in his own tradition. It was a tradition that grounded him. It was from this tradition that he drew the courage to announce the coming of God’s kingdom. It was from this tradition that he found words to change the world. It was from this tradition that he discovered precedents to the

healings and miracles he would perform. It was from this tradition that he discerned who he was and what God was calling him to do.

II.

On the cross, in his darkest hour - a victim in the hands of his enemies, a pawn of the paragons of power, a speck of dust on the boot of the Roman empire, a nuisance to the settled clergy, a bother to the tenured professors,

an annoyance to the business community, and a threat to the common good,

Jesus finds in his tradition, in Psalm 31, words that reframed an execution into victory. To the failures of others, Jesus responds not with condemnation, but with the confidence that only God can give: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

He was falsely accused and feloniously imprisoned.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

He was betrayed by his most zealous follower.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

He was denied by his most loving disciple.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

He was mocked and beaten by the villains of violence.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

He was judged by the holy council, by the governor, by a pseudo king.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

He was sentenced to death, expeditiously, to keep the peace.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

He was hung on a cross in-between criminals. Soldiers cast lots for his clothes. They scoffed at him and taunted him: "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself." His response? "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

At risk of becoming yet one more casualty in the machine of power and fear and violence and coercion, Jesus chooses these words, a found poem from Psalm 31: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." He chooses the last line of his story and gives his life back to his Father, his Abba, his daddy, who is God the Almighty. And in doing so, he provides us with a model of humanity filled with the power of God.

III.

Here we are, at the end of an ecumenical Good Friday worship service. A growing number of voices in the world today predict the death of the church, the eventual eclipse of the Jesus movement. The world thinks that it has pronounced the final word over the church. And on our darker days, we agree. It's true that we have been divided. Divided over theology, identity, and politics. We have fought and bickered like children. We have falsely accused each other. We have betrayed and denied. We have mocked and beaten the life energy out of our brother. We have too quickly and too harshly judged our sister. We have pronounced life sentences when the mercy of God demanded clemency. Again and again, we have crucified the poor, those living with HIV/AIDS, those of different religions and those of no religion, the powerless - women and children - to maintain our level of comfort with the way things are.

But, while we are divided, in him we are one. We are one because he shares his life and his words with us, so that we, too, will find the words that transform defeat into victory. We, too, will love the world without defensiveness, without triumphalism, and without violence. We will do this because this is the kind of strength he provides us. The strength to be pro-active, humble, and kind. The strength to look to our savior, our teacher and friend, who, when faced with defeat and despair, gave up his spirit into the hands of the Father who loved him and who loves all.

Let us pray: Father, Mother, Abba, Ima: Into your hands we commit our spirit. We, your Good Friday people, gather Divided, Despairing, Conflictive, Confused. We come seeking new energy, new ways to face the darkness without falling victim to it. We come mourning with all of creation, which groans even now under our feet and around our heads. We come to surrender once again, to commend our whole lives to you, our relationships, our bodies, our decisions, the words of our mouths. We ask you to send us out, a people renewed, a people who did not turn from his anguish, and a people who do not turn from the anguish of the world you so love. Make us instruments of your mercy and peace and tune us so that we, the church, may play the songs of justice that you so long to hear. In the name of the crucified one, we pray. Amen.

BENEDICTION

Bless you, sisters and brothers.

Bless your way in the world and your witness to Christ.
Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord.
Amen.