

“Into Thy Hands”ⁱ
Sunday, April 9, 2017
Passion/Palm Sunday

 **Luke 23:46-49 (NRSV)**

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said,

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Having said this, he breathed his last.

When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, *“Certainly this man was innocent.”*

And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts.

But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

There is a play called, “*Whose Life is This Anyway?*”

It became one of the first “right to die” movies made, part of arguments that persist today.

In the play, an artist is made a quadriplegic in an accident and fights for the right to end his life.

According to the playwright, the answer to the title question is: “***By God, my life is mine!***”

The irony, of course, is that this man is raging against other people taking charge of his life at a time when he is dramatically confronted with the truth that our lives are definitely *not* and never have been our own.

As we approach the end of our life we are reminded that death is the ultimate rip-off.

Everything we have, all the work we have done, none of it can be taken with us.

Our death is final and determined by God.

In one of his parables, Jesus compared God to a thief in the night; while we are asleep and think we are

secure, God comes and steals everything we've got.

Now I get that this is not the *niciest* image of God, but it is a **truthful** one.

In the end, God is going to take everything we *thought* we had by making us leave it all behind.

When the time comes, the One who so graciously gave us life is also the One who will so unexpectedly take it.

It's important to realize that, nobody has the right to take anything from anyone else unless he owns what he takes in the first place.

Let us pray...Lord, help us to realize that our lives truly belong to you. Guide us to give our lives to you, freely and without reservation. Whenever we face difficulties, give us the courage to pray, "*Into your hands, God, I commend my spirit.*" In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

It takes guts to give our most precious possession – our lives – over to God.

It takes guts to admit that, at the end, our lives really are not ours to give in the first place.

It takes **grace** to realize that our lives are God's gift, to be given and taken away.

Death reveals the absolute truth that answers the question: "*Whose life is this anyway?*"

It is God's and it is not within our control.

It is a **fearful** thing to give over our complete **self** to God; to "*commend our spirit*" to God.

You see, we can't know what God will do with our lives and we fear what we don't know.

If you have commended your life to God on a Sunday morning and then been shocked by what God asks you to do on Monday morning, you have some idea of what I'm talking about.

Our reassurance comes in the form of God's promise that God will never allow anything

worse to happen to us than God allowed to happen to his only Son, Jesus.

Again, this week, I find myself realizing that I'm preaching to myself.

Is it just me, or do many of us spend most of our time trying to get our lives **out of God's control** and into our own?

We work hard; we accomplish all we can; we gather and hoard things; we save all we can; and we do our best to stay healthy so we can live forever-ish.

If God wants our life, then God is going to have to fight us for it; *catch me if you can, God!*”

Truth be told, one way or another God is going to do exactly that.

No amount of resistance will be enough; no place of hiding will protect us.

We are all going to die sometime and God will claim the life he gave us.

When we look at the cross, however, we see something different from how God takes *our* lives.

We see someone so close, so one with the Living God, that He does what we cannot do.

He commends himself – the purpose of his whole life and his work, the darkness of his death – **all of it**, he hands over to God.

God does not need to chase down the Son; in death, the Son goes to the Father, willingly, joyously commending his spirit *on our behalf*.

This word, this manner of death, is a confirmation of the Son's oneness with the Father.

God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is One.

When the Son suffers, the Spirit and the Father are in anguish and the whole Creation heaves.

When the Son commends his life to the Father, presumably the Son is giving himself over to that which he truly is already.

In commending himself to the Father, in his dying, Jesus is dramatically demonstrating the deep unity at the heart of the Divine Trinity. ⁱⁱ

Jesus death on the cross and these final words are a revelation to us.

The Centurion in Luke's gospel today says:

"Certainly this man was innocent."

In Matthew's version, he says: *"Truly this man was the Son of God!"*

Part of the revelation is knowing that walking with God is to venture out into fearful and uncharted territory.

Think about Abraham letting God lead when asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

Think about Moses giving himself over to God and bringing the Israelites out of Egypt.

Think about the Exodus and wandering in the desert.

These events in our history represent walking in insecurity; the ultimate insecurity is the finality of our death.

When we speak of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, we are talking about the same thing Israel did when remembering the Exodus.

We were nothing; then we were something,
because of God.

We could very well be nothing again,
without God.

The only hope we have, the only security we can feel is in the *insecurity* of giving in to the Living God.

As Jesus put it: “*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*”

In commending his life to the Father, Jesus’ last word is a take-charge, strangely confident word.

In the midst of all this anguish and pain, at the end of the worst day in anyone’s life, Jesus takes his life out of the hands of his tormentors and into the hands of God.

Jesus takes charge; he will not let these people have the last word or define the significance of the Cross or the meaning of his life.

Throughout our lives, we wonder about our own significance; we want our lives to count for something, to have meaning and leave a legacy.

We build monuments, we have children, we carve our names and dates in granite over our graves.

We commit our lives to institutions, to causes, to corporations, to our children.

If we're honest, though, we know this to be an exercise in vanity.

Only God knows what our lives ultimately "mean."

Only God can make our lives mean more than we can, if we consider our lives as an offering.

If we commend our lives to God and relinquish control, allowing God to have the last word.

We focus on the brutality of Jesus' horrible death and blame ourselves for taking his life.

The real truth in these words today are this:

No one **took** Jesus' life. He **gave it; he** committed his life to his Father.

We have listened these weeks of Lent as Jesus spoke to us from the cross.

All the words that Jesus spoke and all the work that Jesus did, it is now up to the Father to make it all "mean;" the next move is God's.

Jesus took his life, all that he is, all that he had, said, and did, and gave it over to the Father.

In one last confident, reckless act of faith, Jesus commended his spirit to the Father.

The next move, the last move, is up to God.

In the *beginning*, God; in the *end*, God.

We will all see what these Seven Last Words mean when we get to Sunday and hear that God has the last word.

But for now, on this day, we've heard Jesus' last word.

Pray that you might have the grace, and the faith too, to make it **your** last word, **your** final **prayer**: *“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”*

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

ⁱ This worship series is based on the book, *“Thank God It’s Friday”* by William H. Willimon, © 2006 by Abingdon Press, Nashville

ⁱⁱ Ibid., page 76