

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Lent 5 midweek
April 5, 2017
Luke 23:46

The Dying Word

“Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

As our Lord Jesus speaks His dying word, we hear a word of committal, a word of trust. He is faithful to the end, fully trusting that in death His Father will receive Him in loving arms just as the father of the prodigal received his son with open and welcoming arms. Here again is the paradox of faith. Jesus had cried out in abandonment, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” and yet now He cries out in faith, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!”

And that’s how it often is with the life of faith. God seems so distant at times, especially those times of darkness and woe, those dark nights and days, and yet He ever stands near to embrace us in those strong, loving, fatherly arms. Jesus trusted His Father, and He did it on behalf of all of us. His trust is complete and unwavering. Though He suffers, yet He trusts. Though He dies, yet He trusts. Though the Father is silent and hidden, yet He trusts.

But take note that this dying word is not sighed or whispered. It is not a weak word of resignation by a man who is overcome by death. No. He shouts this word in a loud voice. He summons His strength and shouts it to the highest heavens. He wants the whole world to hear what He has to say. He is the Son of the Father, begotten and beloved from all eternity. He trusts His Father’s mandate that sent Him on this mission to the cross.

So be assured, dear Christian, Jesus is not overcome by death. Rather, He overcomes death by dying. “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). Jesus has taken the sting of death and the venom of the Law into His own flesh, shed His own blood, and now He cries out in victory and triumph as He commits His life to His Father who sent Him. This strong word of the cross cuts through doubt and disbelief. Adam’s death is conquered by this Second Adam’s death. Adam hearkened to the doubting word of the devil and became a transgressor, plunging the world into the chaos of sin. But this Second Adam, the new head of redeemed humanity, holds true to His Father and will not waver even as He dies. His life is in the hands of the Father.

With His final breath, Jesus shows Himself to be the faithful Son, totally surrendered to His Father’s will. Where we have failed, He has succeeded. Where we have sinned, He has proven sinless. Where we doubt, He remains strong and faithful.

You see, being self-absorbed and self-oriented, the old Adam in us resists this surrender. It fights like crazy against the loving embrace of the Father, like a small child throwing a temper tantrum who will not be held. We want to be in control, we want to be in power. We resent any notion that we don't sit in the driver's seat, but in the passenger's seat of our lives. Like so many drowning victims, we think we can swim to shore ourselves. We don't need a lifeguard; we even resist the attempts to save us. We want it all on our own terms.

Yes, you know how it is in your own life—the bargaining, the denial, the transactions — anything but letting go and leaving to God our Father to hold us in safety. Jesus does it. On the cross, He entrusts His life, His mission, His death, everything to His Father. “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

The words are from Psalm 31. From the hymnbook of the living and the dying, Jesus takes up the words of David on His lips, for they are His words, too, wrought by the Spirit of Christ.

In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame;
in Your righteousness deliver me!
Incline Your ear to me; rescue me speedily!
Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me!
For You are my rock and my fortress;
and for Your name's sake You lead me and guide me;
You take me out of the net they have hidden for me,
for You are my refuge.
Into Your hand I commit my spirit;
You have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God. (Ps, 31:1-5)

David, surrounded by his enemies, commits his life into the hand of God. Jesus, the greater Son of David, hanging in the darkness with humanity's sin hanging heavy upon Him, commits His life to His Father. In so doing, He entrusts us as well, gathering all into His death that we might be gathered to Him in our death.

In Luther's day, people were quite intentional about writing down their last thoughts and confession. What you said at your death was what would be remembered about you. This is Jesus' last word of His being humbled unto death in obedience to the Law. This is the last word of His work that began with His Baptism where His Father voiced His approval over His beloved Son. Now at the end of His earthly life, His work completed, the Scriptures fulfilled, the redemption of the world accomplished, He closes His eyes and breathes His last breath with a faithful, trusting word.

Remember these words when it comes time for your last words and make them your “now I lay me down to sleep” prayer. Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit. Say them each night, as the Small Catechism teaches us, in case you should die before you wake. Hold the cross of Jesus before your closing eyes, and rest in peace and joy, knowing that death has been swallowed up in the victory of Jesus' death.

Let us pray: For Your last triumphant cry, for Your faithful trust to the end, for Your final breath of the old creation, for Your entrusting Yourself and us to Your Father, we give You thanks and praise, most holy Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

(From Words of Life from the Cross, CPH, 2010)

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