

Words of Life from the Cross: A Trusting Word!

A sermon based on Luke 23:46.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“I don’t think it means what you think it means.” Who here knows where that quote originated? Of course, it’s from the timeless classic movie, Princess Bride. Anyone here ever seen it before? It’s one of those movies full of memorable quotes, and I just shared one with you. Maybe you remember the context. The group’s leader, Vizzini, is a self-proclaimed ‘brilliant’ Sicilian. He keeps exclaiming “inconceivable” whenever something happens that he didn’t expect. Finally master swordsman Inigo Montoya says **“You keep using that word, I do not think it means what you think it means.”**

I can’t help but think back to a humorous Youtube video I saw a number of years ago where there was this guy walking around, having all these women signing a petition to end women’s suffrage (not for real of course), and hearing all of these women talk about how “we” should be equals to men, “we” thought suffrage ended years ago, it needs to end now (although, women’s suffrage is the right to vote). **“I do not think it means what you think it means.”**

Do you ever have times like that, where you say something, but you don’t really know what you’re talking about? Maybe that’s you when someone’s talking about sports and you have no idea what the difference between a quarterback and a goalie is and whether they both play offense or defense on the same team, and who exactly gets to hit the homerun after the foul? Or maybe you try to be all fancy and use a more sophisticated word in the most incorrect way (I’ve been known to do that myself). You especially notice it with little kids all the time...saying these weird things that cause you to scratch your head, “What?!?” Like Mara, sometimes when we’re playing, we’ll drop her a little bit, catch her before she hits the ground, and she’ll squeal, “We’re married!” “What?!?”

“I do not think it means what you think it means.” Or, to put it another way, “You don’t really understand what you’re saying, do you?” In our gospel today, we saw a case of that, didn’t we? Do you know what it was? Jesus was entering into Jerusalem one, final time. The people lined the roads, spreading their cloaks and palm branches on the path. And, as he rode in on a donkey, their cries filled the skies, **“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” (Mark 11:9,10).**

But did they understand what they were saying...what they were really saying? They thought they did. Jesus’ reputation had preceded him to Jerusalem. They had heard of the recent raising of Lazarus from the dead. They knew Jesus had allowed himself to be acclaimed as the Son of David. Perhaps he would even accept the title of king, if offered the distinction, and would ride forth as the deliverer of his oppressed Jewish people.

You could almost see the stars in their eyes as he came riding in...on a donkey, nonetheless, just like the great prophet Zechariah had foretold. So they waved palm branches, as their ancestors had previously done to inaugurate their former kings; now they bestowed that honor on Jesus. But more than all of that...their words, “Hosanna!” Literally, “Save us, Jesus!” Again, did they really understand what they were saying?

Fast forward five days, and you have your answer. But, you know, as we examine another of Jesus' words of life this morning, don't we have to ask the same question, "Jesus, do you really understand what you're saying?" Here's what our verse from Luke says, "**Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."** *When he had said this, he breathed his last.*"

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Do you understand what he was saying? "Father, I commit...I commend my life to you. I am entrusting myself – my very life – to your care and your protection."

Do you hear the paradox here, the contradiction? A couple weeks ago, we heard Jesus say from that same cross, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (abandoned me, completely separated yourself from me, leaving me all alone)?**" And now, to the same God who turned his face away from Jesus, he now turns over his life? Did he really mean what he said, or did he not understand the situation? Was it only an expression of hope, "God, I'm near the end. I hope you'll change your mind and come back and tend to my spirit."

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Has that ever been your prayer? Trick question...if you were at any of our midweek Lenten services, what did we sing? **"Into your hands I commit my spirit."** If you've ever spoken Luther's Morning/Evening Prayer, you've prayed, **"Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things."** How about this bedtime prayer, **"I pray the Lord my soul to take. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."** My guess is, at least once, that those words, that thought has been in your prayers, "God, I'm entrusting everything to you. I trust that you've got this...that you've got me." Do your prayers of trust mimic Jesus' trusting words from the cross?

I'd like to say yes. I'd like to think in any and every situation, especially in the tough times, when temptation tries to get a firm grip on me, when the pain or the sickness or the trial or the fear or the sadness is kicking my butt, when the future seems so uncertain and I assume rough waters lie ahead...I'd like to think I can just let go and leave it to God...trust he's got it taken care of...he's got a plan, maybe not to end the trial, the temptation, the sickness, sadness (he's never made that promise)...but to trust he's got a plan to bring me through. I'd like to think I have enough faith in Jesus to trust that and commit and entrust myself – my entire life – to him.

I'd like to think that...but is that the reality? Is it for you? "God, I commend my body and soul to your care...but, the sickness or pain has been holding on way too long, my prayers obviously haven't been working, so I'm going to ease off those and find a different route that works." "God, I entrust my future...I trust you hold my future in your hands, and you will make everything work for my good...but my financial future, yeah, being at the point where I can fully trust you'll make sure I can meet all of my expenses and so now I can give offerings to you how you want me too...I'm not there yet." "God, I know you are in control of everything, but this relationship seems too brittle at this time, so I'm going to ease away from you and your Word a little bit to focus more on fixing this relationship."

You know, friends, being self-absorbed and self-centered, the old Adam in us resists this entrusting ourselves, surrendering our entire lives to God and his care. 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 sit, not 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.

In that, are we any different from the crowds of Palm Sunday in that, the crowds who joyously sang, "Our King is here! The Son of David rides for us! Hosanna! Save us, Jesus!" With those words, it sounded like they were entrusting their salvation to Jesus. But then where were they later in the week, when Jesus failed to meet their expectations of a physical and political savior, when the crowds shouted, "Crucify him!"? When they mocked him, "**He saved others, but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him**" (Matthew 27:42)? Were they there? Was that them?

Is that happens when Jesus doesn't meet your expectations? When life is going great, and I clearly see God's plan for me, I have no problem trusting and entrusting my life to Jesus. So very different when life throws a curve and I don't see the way out...I don't see the blessing God has in store. Not that we completely turn on him, like Jews did in less than a week. But is having anything less than 100% trust...or snatching even the smallest matter out of God's hand to take care of it on my own...is that any better? "Into your hands I commend...all things?" I don't think it always means what we want it to mean.

And in these moments of our weakness – when our faith in God is waning and our trust in his care is fading – we can only stumble to the front of the crowds lining the road into Jerusalem and beg, "Hosanna!" "Save us, Jesus!"

The crowds...Palm Sunday...they were plainly saying, "Jesus, we are entrusting our salvation to you." But they didn't understand. They didn't want the saving Jesus was coming to do. We do. We need it. And we can't find it or achieve it by ourselves...so, mirroring Jesus on the cross, we pray, "Father into your hands we commit - we entrust – our salvation."

You know how hard 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.**"

What did he mean? Was it merely hope?

It was Jesus holding onto one little promise, made in Psalm 16, "**My heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.**"

Jesus' dying words were faithful, full of trust in His Father. You see, Jesus had already shown his commitment to his Father's will. He drank the cup of suffering. He gave all his energy, his love...he sacrificed his entire precious and perfect life on the altar of the cross to pay for our sins. He had already been forsaken by God, enduring God's eternal wrath of hell – our hell – there on the cross. Having come in our flesh, been crucified in our place, there Jesus had let our sinful lives – past, present, and future – dominate him on Calvary. He had cried out, "**It is finished!**" "The work of salvation has been completed! The debt of sin has been paid in full!"

And now, his trusting words, ***“Into your hands I commit my spirit.”*** With His final breath, Jesus shows Himself to be the faithful Son. Where we have failed, He has succeeded. Where we have sinned, He has proven sinless. Where we doubt, He remains strong. Now, he doesn't hope, but he trusts in His death His Father will receive Him in loving arms just as the father of the prodigal received his son with open and welcoming arms. He trusts his work has been found acceptable.

And it has. No apologies for being a week early here, but Easter Sunday is God's overwhelming approval of Jesus' work. What happened? Jesus' body didn't see decay. As I think to next week, I can't help but hear God's voice in the background, with his word of approval, ***“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased.”*** Christ has died, but Christ is risen. By his death, sin and satan were destroyed. By his resurrection, death has been defeated. His victory is our eternal victory.

And this week, we will hold that truth before our eyes. Throughout our entire lives, we will hold that truth before our eyes. Yes, at times, God seems so distant, especially those times of darkness and woe, yet He stands ever near to embrace us in those strong, loving, fatherly arms. Jesus trusted His Father, and He did so on behalf of us. His trust is complete and unwavering. Though He dies, yet He trusts. Though He suffers, yet He trusts. Though the Father is silent and hidden, yet He trusts.

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” You know, these words, which echo Psalm 31:5, they were used by Jewish people as a bedtime prayer. The Son, at the end of his life, entrusted himself into the hands of his Father, whose will he had done. We can do the same. We will. So, remember these words when it comes time for your last words. Make them your “now I lay me down to sleep” prayer. Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit. Say them each night, 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. His resurrection is yours. And yes, that's exactly what it means! Amen.