

“Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!

The Seventh Word: Luke 23:44-49

Good Friday Community Service, April 18, 2014

Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut

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Sometimes there is no hidden meaning.

I thought there might be, some deep and hidden definition in one of these final words of Jesus. Perhaps there was a twist, some archaic interpretation buried in the New Testament Greek. So I spent a little time with my concordance just to be sure. *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”* means just what you think it means. Jesus is gasping out his last words. They are words of trust in the midst of the end of earthly life. Eugene Peterson in his widely acclaimed paraphrase The Message phrases it, *“Father, I place my life in your hands.”*

I trust we are not surprised. Jesus was consistent from beginning to end. Jesus placed his life in God’s hands from baptism to burial. From the time he was old and bold enough to wander off from mom and dad to the temple, his answer to their anxious concern *“Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business,”* Jesus committed his spirit to God.

He reminded us—reminds us—to do the same, even in our darkest hour. *“Do not worry,”* he elsewhere reminds us, about stuff that is here today and gone tomorrow. *“Worship the Lord your God and serve only him”* he said in rebuke to the Tempter. *“Father, hallowed be thy name”* he taught us to pray. Five years ago at this time I was struggling with a dying marriage that would end two months later. I lamented to a faith friend, *“Why me?”* His bracing answer *“Why not you?”* reminded me of the consistency of God of whom the hymnist wrote:

*“Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day;
earth’s joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.”*

But in addition to God’s consistency—in life, in death, in life beyond death, as one of the creeds declares—there is one other aspect of this scripture worth noting. Hear again verse 45: *“the curtain of the*

temple was torn in two.” The curtain was that shroud that separated the Holy of Holies, the place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept with the sacred texts, from the rest of the temple. It was the place where God lived, so the devout believed. No one could go into the Holy of Holies except the High Priest, and then only once a year. So sacred was this space that when the High Priest entered, a rope was tied around him so, should he die within the Holy of Holies, he could be pulled out rather than the profane enter and desecrate the space.

Yet now, at the moment of Jesus’ death, that curtain is torn in two. There is no longer separation between us and God. You see! As the letter to the Hebrews declares about Jesus *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* **Hebrews 4:15-16**

Even more, there is nothing separating us from God in Christ, as the apostle Paul declares: *“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Romans 8:38-39

No hidden meaning. He’s our Savior! Thanks be to God!