



Luke 23:44-46
 CrossWords
 Trust
 (Maundy Thursday Service)

Rev. Brian North
 April 13th, 2017

Tonight we bring to a close the series of messages we've been in the past several weeks, looking at the last words of Jesus, as he hung on the cross.

Each Sunday we've looked at one of his final seven statements:

"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

"Today you will be with me in paradise."

"Dear woman, here is your son" and "here is your mother."

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

"I thirst."

"It is finished."

And then the last one, that we look at tonight, that Jesus cried out in a loud voice: **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46)**. I shared with you this past Sunday that I've come to believe that this statement was probably not actually the last one he said, but rather, the statement that John gives us, "It is finished." Both Luke and John say that after each of these statements Jesus breathed his last. I don't think we have to understand this to mean that literally his last breath was the one he used to say either of these statements. And I believe that when Jesus cried out in a loud voice, committing his Spirit into his Father's hands, he then said quietly, to those gathered closer by, "it is finished." That all just kind of makes sense to me when you piece together the four gospel accounts of his death.

The other place of some tension between the gospel accounts is in regards to who was there watching, and where they stood. John mentions five people who stood close by: four women – his mother, his mother's sister, and two Marys, including Mary Magdalene, and then "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He says that everyone else stood at a distance. Luke does not mention any by name, but in verse 49 writes, **"All those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things" (Luke 22:49)**. Mathew and Mark name some of the women, and also say they stood at a distance with everyone else. The only woman that is definitely the same as the four that John lists who were close by, is Mary Magdalene.

And I guess you could read these four accounts and see some discrepancies, and certainly some people do. Three authors do say that they stood at a distance, with one writing that they were nearby. But really, they need not be seen as in conflict with one another and therefore unreliable. One possibility is that it could be different women, other than Mary Magdalene, that they're referring to. Another is that: **They may not have been in the same place the whole time.** Jesus was on the cross for six hours until his death. And so it's highly possible that not everyone stayed in the same place for the duration. It's not like a person got a ticket with an assigned seat to watch this. It wasn't a sporting event, at least not for those who were close to Jesus and loved him. They could have been up close for a while, then moved to the back or off to the side...when they saw someone they recognized who showed up, they might have moved to the back to say hello and grieve together or pray together, then maybe move up closer, or stayed further away. A crowd of people in a situation like this is a little fluid, especially over the course of 6 hours.

The point is, the differences between the gospels here are pretty easily resolvable, and it makes sense that different people would remember different things. And in the end, who stood where is a footnote compared to the main event: That Jesus is crucified on the cross. That's what matters. And his words, "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit" are a statement of trust in his heavenly Father that we would do well to say ourselves.

This statement, like his earlier statement, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is connected to the Old Testament, and to the Psalms in particular. Psalm 31:5 reads: **"Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me O Lord, the God of truth" (Psalm 31:5).** All of Psalm 31 revolves around this theme of trusting God in times of trouble and difficulty. And if we were to boil this down to one thing, it's the issue of trust: trusting God with our future. In the Psalm it's David writing, on the cross it's Jesus speaking...but it could be any of us here, too. And in these words, "Into your hands I commit my spirit" we see a total commitment to giving our life over to God, just laying it in His hands, trusting him for the future.

Now, I'm sure many of you will remember the first sermon of this series, right? Right? ☺ Ok...maybe not...but how about the one from three Sundays ago, when we looked at Jesus' questioning if God had forsaken him? And in that message, the main point was that: **We can trust God with our vulnerabilities and uncertainties – even when it concerns Him.** All of our relationships, if they're going to be healthy, need that level of trust and safety, so that we can share openly and honestly, rather than harboring things that develop into resentment and anger and that kind of thing. The trust that Jesus shows here in tonight's passage is a different kind of trust: that God will take care of him...that when our ability to influence the future is completely down to zero, we can trust God. Not that we should wait until then to trust Him...but that's often when some people realize that not only should they trust him, but they really need to...it's all they have left.

Have you ever been in a situation where the future of your life was completely out of your control? And I mean, situations where you literally could do absolutely nothing to influence your future? There aren't really a whole lot of those situations, I think. Usually, we have some measure of control. And in most instances, once we get to the point where things are beyond *our* ability to influence the outcome, there still is often a pretty strong human element involved in determining the outcome – *other* people have a measure of control.

Take flying, for instance. Once we're on the plane, we don't have control over much of anything. Apparently, even whether or not we're allowed to stay on the plane. But it's not like Jesus at the end of his life, where it's all in the hands of his Heavenly Father, with no human input. In fact, in an airplane, where I have no control, the control is primarily in the hands of the pilots. That's why when I get on a plane to fly somewhere, my prayer life kicks into high gear. I pray for the pilots, but I also pray for the people who put fuel in the plane that there's enough, I pray for every nut and bolt and weld on the plane to hold together, I pray for the jets to work properly, for the electrical wiring, for all the mechanical parts of the plane to function...and I always end by quoting Isaiah 40:31, and asking God to make us soar like on wings of eagles.

It's a prayer, really, that all these people who's work – from designing and building the plane to flying it – would be sufficient to get all of us on board from point A to point B. The only thing I have control over is my choice to get on the plane. After that, I have no control over things, but all these people do. And so we often find ourselves in *those* kinds of situations, which are different than Jesus's situation, where we have to let go of the future and trust other people: when we're looking for a job and others are making the hiring decisions, when kids move out of the home and they're on their own, in surgery when our life is in the hands of the doctors, driving around town we trust everyone who's on the road with us, or if we're a passenger we also trust the person driving the vehicle.

And so we still pray in many of those situations, because we believe, and even know based on experience, that God can influence people's decisions, or intervene in a miraculous kind of way, and so forth. That doesn't mean it always happens the way we want it. And so that's part of "trusting God" as well: that he's got good and perfect plans for you, and is working to bring them to fruition even when it's hard to see the good in our circumstances or situations.

But there are occasions where no human has any control over the future. When a husband and wife discover they're pregnant and, other than eating healthy, they have no control over the development of the baby. We have no control over the movement of the earth, the stars, or any other planets...and of course we are reminded frequently around here that we have no control over the weather. Those are a few instance.

And the last thing in life that we have no control over is what happens to us after we die. Now people are trying to gain control over that through cryogenics, which is the deep freezing of a body in the hopes of resuscitating it later when medical advances might find a cure for a disease that killed a person and allow that person to live again...as I mentioned a couple Sundays ago, there are people working on ways to upload the content of our brains into computers that would then be connected to machines so people could, in theory, live in some kind of a hybrid mechanical/computer/human state. So people are trying to take control even of that.

But Jesus gives us a model of truly letting go of control over that, and letting it all rest in the hands of our Heavenly Father. “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” These are words of trust...these are words of letting go of control. These are words that say, “Not my will, but yours be done.” It’s as if Jesus is saying, “Ok father: it’s all up to you now. I can’t do this on my own. In fact, there’s nothing I can do. I’m trusting you to take things from here, and whatever happens, happens.”

And there’s something that’s freeing and liberating with this. Yes, it can be scary, too – especially if you’re a control freak or have obsessive-compulsive tendencies. But to have this kind of attitude in situations where we have no control over the future, is really freeing. Because when we say to God, “into your hands I commit my spirit...into your hands I commit my future...into your hands I commit this situation...I’ve done all that I can, now it’s all in your hands”...when we get to that point, it’s freeing. We can rest. We can stop trying to make things work out. We can stop trying to control things.

And we don’t have to wait until the end of life to have this kind of attitude, to have this kind of relationship of trusting God with our future. It’s something we can live into every day. We still do what we can, we still use the talents God has given us, we still pursue the things we’re passionate about, we still put forth our best effort. In fact, that’s living as God calls us to. It’s living Christ-like, because Jesus wasn’t a slacker. He didn’t say at the start of his public ministry when he read the Isaiah scroll in church, “This is fulfilled in your hearing” and then do nothing for three years, expecting God to work through him while he sat around drinking coffee and eating doughnuts. He went to work after reading that, and worked hard right up until his death. And yet when we commit our spirits into the hands of the Lord...when we commit our futures and our plans into God’s hands, and if we take that seriously and make sure that what we’re doing lines up with Scripture, and is affirmed by godly people in our lives...when we do that, then we can give our all but do it knowing that God has us covered. God is with us in the midst of it, sustaining us and ordering our steps, and the ultimate outcome is in His hands, even as he works through us toward whatever it is we’re working on.

It's such a freeing approach to life when we have that relationship of trust with God. It's not a license to laziness...but it also takes us out of the driver's seat; it keeps God in first position. And it helps us to see that everything we do is for God's glory. When you approach your work with the idea that God has you there for a reason, that he's given you abilities and passions that make you uniquely you, but we give that over to God and commit ourselves to him, it can transform how we approach our work and how we view our work relationships. It can transform how we approach our leisure time. It can transform how we parent our kids or connect to our grandkids. It can transform how we approach the challenges of poor health, or relationship issues, or how churches make decisions and move forward together in ministry. If we commit all that we have into the hands of the Lord, it can transform us in deep and profound ways, as God gets more and more of us committed to Him.

If you've never committed your spirit into the hands of your heavenly Father, I invite you to do that this evening. Do it for what you experience on the other side of the grave. Once you breathe your last, you can't control what happens, anyway. So you can let your heavenly father know that you want Him to take care of you. You can also do it, however, for your earthly future, as you commit your life into His hands, and live for Him each and every day, as He works things out through you for His glory and His purposes. Let's Pray...Amen.