

## Lenten Devotion - I Entrust My Spirit

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*Luke 23:46 (NRSV): "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."*

*Luke 23:44-49*

Have you ever thought about Jesus' death on the cross as God's way of outwitting the world? Now, I know that is a mischievous way to look at it, but the Jewish authorities and the Roman officials all thought that they were putting an end to this Jesus of Nazareth and more importantly stopping the movement that he began ... right in its tracks. There would be no more mass healings, no more miracles, no more words of Divinely inspired wisdom, no more touching of lives, no more changing of lives, no more restoring lives; no more rocking the boat, overturning tables in the Temple or changing the world! Nope! "We are going to kill Jesus and be done with all this radical life changing hocus pocus!" Or so they thought! God outwitted them!

You have heard me speak of "grace moments." Those moments when we think all is lost and then a ray of sunshine unexpected appears. "Grace moments" in my opinion are God's way of reminding us that just when we think all is done, all is lost, life is over - it is NOT!

When tragedy strikes a family, and it seems that they will never be able to find their way forward, the doorbell rings and it is an unexpected friend bringing over a meal. It is not the meal that is the "grace moment" - it is the friend's presence sharing God's love in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death. Those "grace moments" strung together walk alongside a family revealing a God who still shows up in the midst of our darkest hours; revealing a God who can always bring a rainbow to shine after a mighty thunderstorm! Our God of grace outwits even us and for that I am thankful!

And I am thankful that God outwitted all those who thought they were killing "The King of the Jews!" I am thankful that God's plan was bigger than any plans we might have been able to think about or dream! I am thankful that Jesus recognized this in the midst of his dying and "graced" us with this very moment on the cross.

You see, in those final minutes, when the Roman guards were looking up and thinking, "It is almost over and we will have killed him and this problem will be over!" In those final minutes when the Jewish authorities and Roman officials were finally breathing a sigh of relief that all might get back to normal ... Well, in those final minutes, Jesus didn't let them take his spirit or his life. Barbara Brown Taylor says, "He took himself out of their hands!" Jesus "took back his power," as a psychologist friend of mine has said! Instead of allowing the guards, authorities and officials to KILL him, he willingly gave his life and spirit away to God in those final minutes! Jesus doesn't go kicking and screaming! Jesus doesn't scream out in anger at God or say, "I'm sick of this, just take me! Take me NOW!" No, Jesus says, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Jesus had a choice as to the way he would die. He could go kicking and screaming or he could go "gracefully." By God's grace and together with his Father, Jesus chose to die as he lived, grace-filled! Jesus chose to die as he lived - entrusting his life to his Father, every step of the way - even in the face of death! Jesus chose to die as he lived by giving his life away to others! "His life was not taken from him. Instead, he gave his life away to God." Burton Blair.



Our God of grace upon grace outwitted the world – death could not kill Jesus! Killing Jesus did not end the miracles or the healings. Killing Jesus did not end crowds gathering around to hear what he had to say and teach! Killing Jesus did not put an end to lives being touched and the world being changed in his name! No! You couldn't kill Jesus – he gave himself to God freely! He did what he always did – he entrusted & commended his life to God!

Q: How do we commend our lives to God daily?

Q: How do we entrust our lives to God daily?

It is thought that in saying these words on the cross Jesus was praying the 31st Psalm. Just like Psalm 22 that begins, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" Psalm 31 was a well known Psalm to all the Jews. William Barkley even writes that it was possibly a bedtime prayer taught to children by their mothers.

And so, here in Jesus' final moments, hanging on the cross with his mother standing beneath him offering her presence and encouragement and love, he prays ... 31:1 In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. 2 Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. 3 You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me, 4 take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge. 5 Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

You can't take someone's life away if they have already given it to God! God's amazing grace showers upon us as Jesus commends his spirit to his Father, our God, in these final words from the cross.

May Psalm 31 be your prayer this Holy Saturday. Pray for the ways in which you can commend your spirit and your life to the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit in a new way.

I look forward to celebrating Easter with you tomorrow morning!

*Hope & Peace,*

*Rev. Dr. Deborah Suddarth*

