

“7 For Life”

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TLC Keene, NH

“No Better Hands!”

Luke 23:44 It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”

“Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” (Revelation 1:17-18)

“The security of the hollow of God’s hand ... defies curses, crucifixions, crosses.” (Jones, in His Passion, 321)

INTRODUCTION: Skit [“The Skit Guys”]

I once read the story of a much loved man of God, who on his death bed, called his closest friend/companion on earth. The man’s wish was that upon his death, his good friend conduct his funeral. Pulling his friend close he whispered, “I realize that I’m giving you a rather difficult task. But,” he added, “if you will do this thing for a dying man – conduct my service – I promise never to ask you to do it again.” (Chappell, 70) ☺

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”

Like the previous seven words from the cross, we can’t begin to grasp the import of the moment when, setting His sights for home, Jesus breathed His last. Was it a simple sigh of relief for a lifetime of being given and spent on behalf of others? Was it a dying man’s last whimper, brought on the by the excruciating toil of the last 24 hours?

Neither! Rather, it was a full-throated prayer of trust in the very One from whom He had come, and now, to whom He was returning. “As his robe was woven of one piece,” says one commentator, “so also [Jesus’] life.” There was no dissonance between his living and his dying. (Chappell, 71)

Where, as sure and certain was Jesus’ trust and confidence in the Father, no less our own – assured FIRST by Jesus’ ...

Commitment.

¹ Now when [Jesus and His disciples] drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them: “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.”

⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying ...

⁵“Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them.

Wouldn’t you have loved to be in on the conversation that took place – “*before the foundations of the world*” (Ephesians 1:4) – in which the Trinity was conversing regarding the plan of our salvation; at that priceless moment when Jesus said, “I’ll do it. I’ll go.”

Commitment! “Original, perfect, and purposeful,” says one commentator, “to act out the role of a sacrificial Lamb offered on the grim altar of the world’s guilt.” (Rees, in Bodley, 97) Commitment! In short supply in today’s society ... in the way folks treat marriage/friendships, or commitment to the least, last and the lost of society ... and even in the way we take a pass on sharing the Good News!

“We have seen its collapse in our cheap accommodations to wrong,” with the Father Himself watching on “with pain and protest as the world’s termites eat the once strong timbers out of our conscience and character.” (Rees, in Bodley, 100)

There are glimpses. Like Charles Kingsley, 19th century Anglican Pastor and professor, who was walking along the English coast one evening, contemplating his life. Whereupon, returning to his room, he sat down and wrote: “My birthright! Beside the sleepless sea and beneath the sleeping stars I have given myself to God, a vow if He gives me the strength I pray for, never to be recalled!”

Commitment. A rare commodity, but not for Jesus ... Jesus to His mission/to you/me!

“No one takes [my life] from me (Jesus said), I lay it down of my own accord ... (with) the authority to lay it down, and ... take it up again.” (John 10:17-18)

And because He was committed, to the end, our trust in Him is assured. Hallelujah!

Where, secondly, our call to trust rests on Jesus ...

Confidence.

⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a **loud voice** (again, no whimpers here), “Father (ending His seven sermons from the cross the way He began them), *into your hands I commit* (entrust, deliver) *my spirit!*”

Along with our Lord’s commitment, comes His confidence:

Secure in Father’s presence – “Father” ... where from His earliest days, Jesus “*must be about my Father’s business*” (Luke 2:49; also John 13-17 where Jesus mentions the Father 53 times).

Secure (also) in the Father's promise – *"Into Your hands"* ... another Word from the cross rooted in the promise/fulfillment of Scripture – in this case Psalm 31[:3-5]:

*"You take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. **Into your hand I commit my spirit.**"*

Secure in the Father's presence, secure in the Father's promise ... Jesus is also ...

Secure in the Father's protection – *"I commend my Spirit"* ... Jesus no longer in the hands of sinners, or with our sin on *His* hands, but now safe/secure in God's hands.

What better place to be, child of God, what better place to be! Where, the final reason for our trust's assurance is Jesus' ...

Coronation.

⁹ *And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"*

Possibly attributing Jesus' death to the betrayal of a friend, the weak will of a Roman Governor, a prideful people who wanted Him dead from the beginning, or His own Father, who in His love for this planet *"laid upon Him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:6) ... in the end Jesus went the way of sorrows willingly – for you, child of God, for us all.

Yes, "No Old Testament sacrifice ever died willingly," notes one commentator. "No lamb, goat, or sheep" ever said, "Pick me, pick me!" (Wiersbe, *The Cross of Jesus*, 117) But Jesus did, thus setting into motion a kingdom-crowning chain of events.

Like the earthquake that rocked Jerusalem that day, with the massive curtain separating the holy place from the most holy place in the temple being violently torn in two (from top to bottom) ... with rocks split apart, and tombs opened ... the bodies of those whose hope had been in the coming Messiah being raised, doing a walkabout in the city ... bringing a single soul to make the solid declaration: *"Truly this was the Son of God!"*

But something greater was set into motion with this final Word from the cross. Spoiler alert! Come Sunday, Jesus won't be where they laid Him! Why? Because the Father said this world is worth yet one more surprise. Because Jesus trusted and entrusted His living *and* His dying to the hands of that Father ... now extending those hand upon which you and I are forever engraved ... hands that will forever bear the marks of His kingly love (Isaiah 49:16).

Where, upon praying this Word, another chain of events was set forth into motion:

Our now possessing “*every spiritual blessing in heaven*” (Ephesians 1:3) ... of we ourselves being issued an invitation to trust Him – to trust His every Word ... to trust Him enough to enter often into His presence – to “storm the gates” – to converse with Him, with the guarantee that your prayers will both be heard and answered.

Yes, we, too now possesses the same assurances of the Father’s presence, promise and protection, rejoicing when Jesus says with certainty and confidence:

“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”
(John 10:28)

THEREFORE, child of God:

† Be glad to be His city, His Jerusalem, the place of His gracious visitation.

*“The Lord bless **you**, O habitation of righteousness”* (Jeremiah 31:23)

You are His destination. *You* are the object of His great affection. *You* are the “city” of His dwelling ... whom Jesus desires to meet, on whatever road you are on.

† Trust Him/His Word, *especially* when the destination is hidden from sight.

In the inconsolable pain of your loss ... the occasional mêlée in your marriage ... in the uncertainty of our times. Jesus is our vision. His hands, as also the Father’s, have you!

Where, “if Jesus did not make this one thing plain, nothing he ever said is clear; and that is that the love of God is a searching love. It goes into the hills after a lamb. It goes into a corner of a house after a coin. It waits by way for the prodigal ... Always Jesus is looking, calling, desiring that we be found, known” laid on His shoulders rejoicing ... all the way back to Him. [Adapted from Chappell, *Eight Days that Rocked the World*, 18; Luke 15:5]

† [Child of God] let us not lose sight of this – of Him.

Yes, “happy are they who have welcomed this [faithful] Rider ... Happy are they in whose mouth are the reins” of this final Word. (Ambrose) *“Into Your hands”*

HANDS that hold, and HANDS that direct ... HANDS from which come all good things ... not the least of which come forgiveness and life in Jesus’ name. Rejoice to know that name. We most certainly know that voice. Yes, we are “in good HANDS” ... “to have and to hold, until death do us part” ... to have/to hold you, child of God, you ... forever! *Amen*.

FRIDAY E-MAIL:

It is oft-referred to as the “world’s most dangerous walkway” – Spain’s Caminito del Rey (you can Google it). It is not for the faint of heart. Originally constructed in 1921, the most treacherous portion comprises almost two miles of rickety looking bridges. A few years back, it went through renovations, but even still, caution is warranted. Of the bridge on social media, one person wrote, “Traverse a 1 meter wide path hanging precariously on the edge of a 600 foot plummet to your certain death? Sign me up!!” Another, “Most of this looks like sidewalks in Chicago.” Here’s a humorous one. “Send the Liberals first.” Most who walk it make to the end! But ½ dozen or so have died.

Of course, the world’s most dangerous walkway is not the Caminito del Rey, but the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows, and Calvary’s cross for you and me. Where, Jesus walked the way of the cross for us so that we might make our way to the cross and beyond. Yes, welcome to Holy Week, and to Jesus’ final two Words from the Cross.

This Palm Sunday, or Sunday of the Passion? It is “*Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit*” – another of Jesus’ Words rooted in the Scriptures, in this case Psalm 31. We’ll be taking up that Psalm in our Adult Bible Class. But if you’d like to get a jump on Sunday’s message, read **Matthew 21:1-11**. Where this Sunday’s message is about trust – the disciple’s and Jesus’ own trust in His Father. What does that look like? I mean, if you conjured up an image of perfect trust, what would that look like? A child thrown up into the air, knowing that her father is going to catch her? Pulling up to a busy intersection a little too fast and knowing that when you hit the break peddle you’re going to stop? Getting ready for the church this Sunday, knowing that the sanctuary you visited a few weeks ago is going to be there this week? (HINT, HINT!)

Let’s take the journey into God’s Word and to the Cross together. A little extra time in the sanctuary of the Lord won’t keep you from the other important aspects of your life. A little extra time reflecting on Jesus’ final Words from the cross will not be wasted. You have my guarantee ... *and* the Father’s promise. Yes, let’s take the journey ... to His Word of life ... to His Table of grace. Where Holy Week is more than some yearly pilgrimage. Indeed, in our going, we run straight to the heart of God.

So with the host that received Jesus that first Palm Sunday we rejoice to say:

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he whom comes in the name of the Lord!”

SYOS!