



## Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Good Friday, 2015

### **“Father, Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit”**

*(Luke 23:44-46)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last” (Luke 23:44–46).*

**COLLECT:** Almighty God, graciously behold this Your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and delivered into the hands of sinful men to suffer death upon the cross; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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During this Lenten season, we've reflected upon the words spoken by Jesus as he hung dying on the cross. These were his seven last utterances before death, spoken in his most difficult hours:

- For those who put him on the cross he prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."
  - To the repentant thief he promised: "Today you will be with me in paradise."
  - To his mother he said, "Woman, behold your son." And to his disciple: "Behold your mother."
  - To God the Father he lamented, "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?"
  - In anguish he cried: "I thirst!"
  - In triumph he declared: "It is finished!"
- And now, in death, he prays: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"

This is the final word from the cross. This is the last of the seven, spoken with Jesus' dying breath. Again it is a prayer: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"

He's quoting Psalm 31:5, with just one word added—Father. Interesting enough, this verse was the prayer every Jewish mother taught her child to say last thing at night. It was one of the most well-known prayers of Jesus' day. It was a night-time prayer, comparable to one that many of you learned: Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep . . . Luther's evening prayer includes something similar:

“Into Thy hands I commend myself—my body and soul and all things.” Accordingly, Jesus’ last words before he closes his eyes in death are those of a bedtime prayer. Even on a cross Jesus died like a child falling asleep in his Father’s arms.

These last words from Jesus on the cross tell us much about his death. They are no longer words denoting the Father’s abandonment and judgment, but words of affection and trust. The judgment has been completed. Jesus’ mission is accomplished. He has already said, “It is finished” which means our sin has been atoned for. So Jesus commits himself to the Father for final vindication through resurrection. And with his last words he also lays claim again to his relationship with God—as the beloved Son of the Father.

These last words tell us much about his death, but they also have something to say about our deaths, when we die in him. It means that the Father can now accept *us* into his presence because of the price paid by his Son. We too may now address God as Father. We are now restored to a right relationship with the Father—both now and at the hour of our death. With these words Jesus is teaching us how to die. We can now entrust ourselves into the hands of the Father.

You’re familiar with the advertisements of Allstate. “You’re in good hands with Allstate.” The slogan wants you to believe that, during times of catastrophe or calamity, Allstate will be there to take good care of you. But there are even better hands in which to place yourself: the hands of your heavenly Father. They are the best of hands—supporting, caring, protecting. They are the safest place to be, in times of wealth and woe, even at the time of death. These are the hands into which Jesus placed himself. And these are the hands into which we get to place ourselves. Today in

your life and in all circumstances you can place your cares and concerns into God's strong and gracious hands.

The problems you face—broken relationships, poor health, financial hardships, temptations to sin—God can help with all of these. You can entrust them to his hands. And just like Jesus, at the moment of your death you can even place yourself into the strong and gracious hands of our Father in heaven.

These final words of Jesus from the cross also inform us about the nature of death. He says, “. . . into Thy hands I commit my spirit.” That is, physical death involves a separation, a separation of the spirit (or soul) from the body. Even for Jesus, the spirit immediately goes to be with the Father at the moment of death, while the body remains behind.

As with Jesus, so also with us. The spirits of those who die in the faith depart to be with the Father, while the body remains behind. Think of your loved ones who have died in the faith. What is left behind at the cemetery is an empty shell. They are not there. You can be certain, however, that their spirits are at rest and peace with God.

But this is not the end. Nor is this what God intended to be the final condition of his saints. There will come a day, the Last Day, when spirit and body are reunited. For Jesus this reuniting took place on Easter morning when he rose physically from the dead.

The resurrected Lord was no ghost or phantom! He was fully and gloriously restored as a human being with both body and soul. And his body was incorruptible, that is, no longer subject to the limitations of age or disease or death.

So it is with us. When we die our spirits go to be with God. Our bodies are laid to rest in the ground.

These bodies decay and disintegrate. Often, today, that process is accelerated through cremation. Either way, our bodies with enough time will become dust. But when Jesus comes again on the Last Day, then he will reunite our bodies (new bodies) with our spirits, never to be separated again.

It sounds impossible to our ears. But remember: he created man out of the dust. It will be no trouble for him to recreate us out of the dust. Only then will be fully restored as God always intended us—whole with incorruptible body and soul! What happened to Jesus in his death and resurrection will happen to us, because of Jesus.

So his death gives us confidence when we face death. His resurrection assures the future resurrection of our bodies! Because of him we need not fear the judgment seat of God at the time of death because Jesus has made us right with God through his sacrifice. Since we are forgiven, we can entrust ourselves to God's strong and protecting hands both in life and in death.

One last thing: Do you remember as a child playing so hard and long outside that when you finally came in and laid your head down and you fell asleep in an instant, wherever you happened to land. And do you remember the sensation of waking up in a different room? Do you remember the momentary confusion? Maybe you fell asleep in the car on the way home and, much to your surprise you woke up the next morning in your own bedroom. Or maybe the last thing you remember was falling asleep with your head on grandma's lap in grandma's house, and then, almost miraculously, as if you had been transported through time and space, you woke up the next morning in your own home. Clearly, someone with strong and gentle arms carried you from one place to the next.

Death is going to be like that. We will fall asleep and then, without any awareness of the passage of time, we will wake up, (or better said, we will be awoken), to find ourselves in another place, the place where we belong. And this only because of the sacrificial death of Jesus.

At the moment of his death Jesus prayed: “Father into thy hands I commend my spirit!” Because of Jesus, we can pray the same prayer – at night before falling asleep, perhaps before a difficult meeting at work, maybe right before the surgery, and especially when we know we are dying: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” Amen.



