

Throughout the season of Lent, we have learned something about prayer. Jesus has shown us what it means to pray for others in the midst of temptation. Jesus has shown us what it means to pray to submit to the will of God. And Jesus has also shown us what it means to pray for our enemies and for those who persecute us. But now we come to the last example of Jesus praying during his passion. While he is hanging on the cross, he calls out with a loud voice: "Father, into your hand I commit my spirit." I want you to pay attention to two things about this: first of all, how he says it, and second of all, what he says.

Luke tells us that Jesus said this with a loud voice. He was calling out with a loud voice. And we might not think much of that. We might think that it's just another detail that we can just gloss over. But it's actually pretty surprising, because we would not expect a crucified man to call out loudly in this way, especially one who is just about to die. And the reason for this, Christians, is because of the design of the cross, the way that the cross made a person hang. Basically, you hung on the cross in such a way that you had to work very hard at breathing. It basically forced you into a position where you couldn't breathe out without a lot of effort. Because what you had to do was push yourself up with your feet on the cross, and then you would be able to breathe out normally. So in other words, if you don't push yourself up like this, you eventually suffocate under your own body weight because of the way that the cross is built. That's why, for example, the soldiers break the legs of the thieves who were crucified with Jesus. Because they are no longer able to push themselves up, they suffocated quickly and died. But pushing yourself up in this way, Christians, was a lot of work. It was basically like exercise. It was like doing exercise just to breathe. And just like exercise for us wears us out and makes us tired over time, it's the same way for a crucified man. He eventually gets so tired just from pushing himself up that he simply doesn't have the strength to do it anymore. And because he can't push himself up anymore, he suffocates after a few days. So basically, a crucified man about to die would find it very difficult to speak, let alone to speak loudly. We all know how difficult it is to talk when we're short of breath. Can you imagine trying to yell in that same situation?

What all of this means, though, is that Jesus is not yet that tired. He still has the strength to cry out like this. He still has the strength to yell, which means that he's not really that close to death. He could've lived longer if that had been the case. He doesn't have to die right now. But the fact that he does die right now shows that he chooses to die in this moment. Jesus chose to give up his life at this exact moment on Good Friday. Jesus is not weakly accepting the inevitable. Jesus is not giving up. He's not just refusing to go on any longer. Jesus is putting himself into his Father's hand, submitting himself entirely to the Father's will, and dying in that moment.

But that leads us to the other point: what he said. Jesus prays, "Father, into your hand I commit my spirit." Jesus is actually quoting from our Psalm for this evening, Psalm 31. And if you want to, you can look at your bulletin to see some of the verses from that psalm. Verse 5, for example, says: "Into your hands I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God." So why does Jesus quote the first part of that verse? What's his point? It's because Psalm 31 perfectly describes what's happening to Jesus right now. When David wrote this psalm all those years ago, David was going through a very difficult time, a time of great distress. Verse 13, for example, says: "For I hear the whispering of many--terror on every side--as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life." David was aware that his enemies wanted to kill him. He was aware of their plotting. He was aware of their plans against him. And how much

worse was this for Jesus, because the people who plotted against him succeeded? They had him crucified. They put him to death. And they continued to whisper against him all around.

Verse 10 also says: "For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing. My strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away." David felt that his strength was disappearing under the weight of the danger around him. And even though Jesus didn't have iniquity, even though he didn't have any sin, his strength was failing too on the cross. His bones were wasting away as he neared death, even if it might've been a while longer. So Psalm 31, then, certainly describes what Christ is going through. All the things that happened to David all those years ago are finding their fulfillment in the suffering of Christ.

But Psalm 31 is not about giving up. It's not about whining or complaining. Psalm 31 is a psalm of confidence. It is a psalm of trust in the Lord. Because even in the midst of danger, even in the midst of all of those enemies, David could still say, verses 1 and 2: "In you, O Lord, do I take refuge. Let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness, deliver me. Incline your ear to me. Rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me." So David turns to the Lord in the midst of his distress, because he knows that the Lord will help him. He knows that the Lord will deliver him. This is why David could pray: "Into your hand I commit my spirit." He was secure and confident in the Lord, even in the midst of danger.

And Jesus is the same way. And this is why he quotes this psalm. Jesus does not waver. He does not give up. Jesus is not whining or complaining. Jesus trusts in his Father. He willingly puts himself into his hands. Jesus turns to his Father even in the midst of his great pain and submits himself fully to him, praying, "Father, into your hand I commit my spirit."

So through this prayer, Christians, Jesus shows us what it means to trust in God in the midst of trouble. Jesus shows us what it means to put ourselves into his hand. Though we may be surrounded by enemies on every side, God will be our fortress. Though we may be wasting away, God will save us, and he will deliver us. Though we may be facing our own death, God will not abandon us. He will not leave us alone. We can trust in him, knowing that he will be with us no matter what happens. And we too can pray, "Father, into your hand I commit my spirit," knowing that we are safe in his almighty hand. Because God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

So Christians, no matter what you may be going through, no matter what trouble you may be facing, no matter what dangers surround you, pray to the Lord. Trust in him. Put yourself into his mighty hand. Submit yourselves to him like Jesus submitted himself to his Father, and remember that God will care for you, because he will hear you and he will answer you in the day of trouble.

Let us pray. Father, into your hand we commit our spirits. Deliver us from every trouble and save us from every danger, because you are our faithful God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.