

Into Your Hands I Entrust My Life

Centenary United Methodist Church

April 10, 2022

TITLE

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

PALM SUNDAY

I know it's Palm Sunday. We didn't have palm branches, but we all can wave our arms and shout "Hosanna!" In fact, let's do that now.

"Hosanna!"

But today, I want to focus on final words.

Few people actually have their final words on this earth recorded. So when we do get to hear a person's final words — and record them, either digitally or write them down on paper — well, they become extra special.

And the final words of famous people sometimes can be interesting.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Consider:

- Thomas Edison, inventor of the telephone, said, "It is very beautiful over there."
- Singer Bob Marley said, "Money can't buy life."
- John Arthur Spenkelink, the first man to be executed after the reinstatement of capital punishment in Florida, said, "Capital punishment means those without capital get the punishment."
- Poet Emily Dickinson, said, "I must go in. The fog is rising."
- Actor Humphrey Bogart said, "I should have never switched from Scot to Martinis."
- Apple co-founder Steve Jobs said, "Oh wow. Oh wow. Oh wow."
- Playwright Wilson Mizner, told the priest who came in to give him last rights, "Why should I talk to you? I've just been talking to your boss."

Some people say something that is a little more, shall we say, permanent. They make a statement on their tombstones. Here are a few fun ones that I found:

- **RODNEY** Comedian Rodney Dangerfield
- **MERV** Talk show host Merv Griffin.

- **MEL BLANC** Cartoon voice actor and creator Mel Blanc.
- **PYRAMID** Someone was expecting a little more, like a pyramid.
- **WHATEVER** Someone was not all that impressed with death.
- **DAUGHTERS** One man deserved kudos for dealing with a house full of women.
- **HOLE IN ONE** For the golfers in the room or online — a different kind of hole in one.
- **ATHEISTS** And of course, here is one aimed at atheists — all dressed up and no place to go.

Those final words are in some ways funny, in some ways thought-provoking, and in some ways sad. In some ways they give us insight into that person's life — their joys, their concerns, their feelings.

Today we conclude our Lenten sermon series on the seven final sayings of Jesus from the cross. So far, Jesus has:

- Offered forgiveness.
- Given us a glimpse of what happens when we die.
- Created the basis for the church family.
- Taught that God never leaves, even when things seem overwhelmingly difficult.
- As Maria Penrod told you last week, Jesus showed his humanness in declaring he was thirsty. And we get a feel that Jesus' mission was accomplished when he said, "It is finished."

We conclude with Jesus' final words before his death and resurrection. Let's hear what Jesus said by reading together ...

Luke 23:44-47

It was now about noon, and darkness covered the whole earth until about three o'clock, while the sun stopped shining. Then the curtain in the sanctuary tore down the middle. Crying out in a loud voice, Jesus said, "*Father, into your hands I entrust my life.*" (or into your hands I commit my spirit) After he said this, he breathed for the last time. When the centurion saw

what happened, he praised God, saying, “It’s really true: this man was righteous.”

May God add a blessing to the reading, hearing and understanding of scripture.

Remember Jesus was suffocating — that’s how the cross usually killed a person. But according to the scripture, Jesus musters up enough breath for one final cry.

Jesus shows faith in God and turns over his spirit — his life — to God the Father. There is going to be no further pain. There will be no further humiliation.

Jesus once again teaches, and once again he quotes scripture to do so, this time Psalm 31. In that psalm, King David is singing praises to God for the Father’s provision of refuge in the Israelite king’s chaotic life. It reads like this in Psalm 31:5 ...

Psalm 31:5

“I entrust my spirit into your hands; you, Lord, God of faithfulness — you have saved me.”

And again, it’s a lesson — this time about what we are supposed to do. We had a great discussion last week in the adult Sunday school class about so-called “born again moments.” The question didn’t start with that in mind, but somehow we started talking about the moment a person is “born again.”

For some people, that’s a key moment in time — something prompts them to give their life to Jesus and they change their ways.

I have had the privilege to know several people with that kind of experience in their lives.

I didn’t have that experience. I remember my mom taking me to church with her when I was about 3 years old.

I remember her leaving, and I remember crying — or maybe freaking out.

DUTCH DOOR

It was one of those Dutch doors kind of rooms. I’m sure it was pretty low, but it seemed like it was a mile high to my young eyes.

My point is less about a door and more about the idea that I grew up in the church — Baptist, so please forgive me. I never had the “born again” moment. But

I did have the moment when something tipped the scales, and I had to profess my belief in the risen Christ.

- It was a revival with Pastor Fred Doergge.
- He had a synthesizer — which in 1984 was “big time.”
- Youth night featured “backward masking.” Probably hokum, but in that era, people were convinced that the Beatles and others were sharing devil messages on their records, and you could hear it if you played it backward.
- I didn’t really buy it then — and certainly don’t now — but I simply couldn’t stay seated when the time came for the alter call.

That was a moment all about surrendering myself to God by proclaiming my belief in Christ.

On the cross, Jesus, when he said “Into your hands I commend my spirit” or “I entrust my life,” Jesus is talking about surrendering himself to God.

And that’s significant because of something else that happens in that passage we read earlier. And it’s the part I admit I am most fascinated by. Did you catch what happened to the curtain in the temple?

At the moment Jesus dies, the Luke scripture tells us “the curtain in the sanctuary tore down the middle.”

What does that mean? Well, maybe the most significant point of these entire seven sayings from Christ.

Let’s work our way toward the sanctuary in question.

VIDEO

First, this is a scale model of the old city at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. You get a feel for the scale of the temple in comparison to other parts of the city.

TEMPLE

And here is the temple.

The raised part in the middle is the sanctuary.

SCHEMATIC

Inside that structure were two areas. The area you can see is where priests would bring the daily offerings. Behind that was considered the “Holy of Holies.” It’s where the ark of the covenant — before it was stolen — resided. It’s where the Israelites believed God dwelled among them — God’s house, so to speak.

This Holy of Holies was considered so sacred that only one priest could enter it once a year, on the Day of Atonement. The other priests would tie a rope around his waist in case something happened to him in there so they could drag him out. If they went inside, they thought they would die.

So with those locations identified, it’s now about 3 p.m., about the time Jesus dies. And a priest would have been bringing the afternoon or evening sacrifice to place on the table in the center of that outer room.

And it’s at that instant that the curtain that that separate the two spaces begins to tear in two.

CURTAIN

Now, this is not a sheer curtain like we have in our homes today. This doesn’t tear easily.

No, this is more like a thick area rug hanging in that location. Have you ever tried to cut an area rug? Or how about tear it with your bare hands?

You might as well try to rip a phone book in half with your hands. The point is, it’s not something a person can do. And yet, the curtain begins to tear on its own.

You see, at that moment when Jesus dies, his mission of reconciling all of us sinners to God is complete. He has taken the burden of our sins with him, and he has died to sin even though he himself never sinned.

And because of Jesus fulfilling this mission, there is no more separation between God and humanity. There is no more need for a curtain. Jesus opened access for us all with the spilling of his blood.

When Jesus gives up his life, he does so for everyone in this room, everyone watching online, and everyone not even born yet on this earth.

The chasm created all those years ago with the introduction of sin in the Garden of Eden is wiped away, with Jesus bringing humankind and God together again, once and for all-time.

So today we celebrate Jesus by shouting “Hosanna” in honor of our king.
But we also celebrate Jesus paying our ransom.
So, if we choose, our tombstones all can read “Debt paid in full.”