

It is Finished... Into Your Hands



Can we just admit that today is a weird day? In listening to podcasts to

get ready for this sermon, I heard several different pastors giving several different opinions about whether churches should do palms or incorporate the passion narrative into worship today. There's a lot to balance here. For us to fully grasp what we're going to celebrate Sunday, we need to experience the darkness of Maundy Thursday & Good Friday, but life is busy and the odds of getting everyone that will worship this us on Sunday to a Maundy Thursday or Good Friday service is highly unlikely. But we can't skip right from the celebration of Palm Sunday to the celebration of Easter Sunday. We miss some of the depth, some of the story, some of the power not only of the cross but the empty tomb. So, today, we balance.

We started worship loudly, triumphantly: We heard the proclamation of the story of Palm Sunday. We've waved our palm branches, shouted our hosannas, cried for God to save us. But in our scripture this morning, we have come down from that high and holy moment. And throughout the week, we'll come down even further. We'll walk into the darkest valley that we can enter as Jesus' entire earthly ministry appears to be dismantled in a matter of a few days. And it all culminates where we've been dwelling for our entire Lenten season: at the cross where Jesus would speak his final words.



It's good and right that we're walking this journey and that it leads us to

the cross. The cross is the climax of the story, the messiest part of this conflict between the Way of Jesus, the Kingdom of God, and the powers and principalities of this world. This is why we've been slowly and intentionally walking through Jesus' final words. It's so important for us to see what the cross is and means and what happened here on this holy place called Golgotha in Aramaic and Calvary in

Latin. John speaks of it as the moment of Jesus' glorification. He is glorified on the cross because the cross is the moment in which God gives the son to save us, the moment in which God convicts us of sin, reveals to us the cost of grace and the divine willingness to extend it to even us, takes up the sins of the world, and shows us what love looks like so that we might follow in living lives of sacrificial love.



So, we come to the end of this part of the series and hear from two of the

gospels: Luke and John. In Luke's gospel, we hear Jesus say "Into your hands I entrust my spirit." But the scene is bigger than just the words that Jesus has spoken. What I love about this telling of the crucifixion is that every sentence in Luke's Gospel has great meaning. We're told right away that darkness had come over the land. It was as if the sun itself could not bear to look upon the deeds human hands had done. Next, we're told that the curtain in the temple is torn in two, giving humanity an access to the divine in a way that couldn't have been fathomed otherwise.

Then we're told of a great shout that Jesus cries; Matthew and Mark tell us nothing more; in their gospels Jesus lets out a great cry as he's dying. Luke says that Jesus' great cry was again words from the Psalms. Psalm 31:5, to be exact. The Psalmist is expressing his thankfulness that God has been his refuge and the rest of the Psalm is David's expression to live a righteous and faithful life because he has experienced God's goodness.

This was Jesus' dying prayer. In a moment of prayer, Jesus expresses his relationship with God once again, despite feeling forsaken, he still calls God father in these waning moments of life. It was a prayer of absolute trust in God. Jesus had forgiven his enemies, offered mercy to a thief, prayed for his mother, come to a place

where he felt abandoned by God, and expressed his physical thirst; but before his death, he declared the shout of triumph, “It is finished,” and offered this beautiful prayer of absolute trust in his Father.

What impresses me is that this just feels like such an entire turn-around from where we were two weeks ago. Jesus cried out in a loud voice from his beaten body, “Why have you forsaken me?” Jesus felt the difference between being in God’s presence and not for the first time in his short life. But mere moments later as Jesus knows the end is near, something changes. Jesus expresses again the relationship that he and God share with one word: Father. It’s like a restoration is happening right before our eyes. At least it’s a realization that Jesus wasn’t forsaken in the least to begin with.



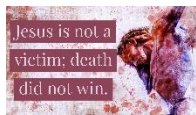
Then we have the other last word Jesus spoke. John does not mention

the great cry but tells us that Jesus died saying, “It is finished” (John 19:30). In John’s gospel, “It is finished” and the great cry are, in fact, one and the same thing. But it isn’t a shout of one who has lost, who has fallen short. It isn’t the shout of a broken body finally admitting defeat, giving up, surrendering to the pain and gore of the cross. No, the word that John uses that Jesus would have cried is the cry of the one who has won through the struggle; it is the cry of the one who has come out of the dark into the glory of the light, and who has grasped the crown. So then, Jesus died a victor and a conqueror with a shout of triumph on His lips.

We so naturally equate death with losing. And it is a loss. When someone dies, we do in fact lose them. They’re no longer with us, and we miss their presence, their sense of humor, their love, and so many other things. And I do not want to reduce the pain we experience and the mourning we go through when we lose someone. It is sad, even when

we believe in the resurrection and eternal life. It hurts. It sucks. And sometimes death truly is the enemy that we fight and sometimes death truly is a loss. We feel defeated and forsaken.

But this is not the case with the death of Jesus. It was sad, don't get me wrong. The sun forbade to shine upon the death of Jesus, the crowd mourned, his mother cried, the centurion proclaimed the injustice of what had just happened.



But Jesus is not a victim, and death didn't win, even now before the resurrection. Jesus is a servant completing the task to which God has called him. Jesus the victor because his death was the death of death, the end of the sacrificial system, the ultimate sacrifice that allows us to come through the dark valleys and find celebration. It is the end of the strife, the end of the suffering, the end of the straining. Jesus embraces death and knows the joy of victory. His life has been completed on our behalf. He's completed his mission. He is not afraid of this last breath.

When this is our daily prayer, we never have to be afraid. Jesus ended his suffering by teaching us how to live each day—not in fear but in confidence and hope: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”