

# St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Good Friday ✠

April 14, 2006

*Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe*

**“Jesus called out in a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.”** (Luke 23:46)

He was about to die. But he wasn’t alone. His family was there – his mother and others. His friends were there – including his close friend whom he loved dearly. They came to be with him in his dying hour. And there were others there – his enemies, his executioners, as well as anyone who happened to pass by. His death bed was a cross. This was no ordinary death and it was no ordinary crucifixion. For on that hill outside Jerusalem the very Son of God was about to die.

What would be his final words? No doubt his friends, family, as well as his enemies wondered. He had already spoken six times. He asked his father to forgive, he promised paradise to a criminal. He cared for his mother. He cried out in agony and thirst. And he announced that his work was finished. He can’t say much more. His breathing is labored. His muscles are weak. Death can’t be far off now.

But wait, he has one more word. One more time, Jesus presses his feet to the nails, straightens his legs, takes a deep breath and (we read from Luke chapter 23): **“Jesus called out in a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.”**

Jesus’ final word was a word of trust. It was a word of trust in a loving Father. And it was a word of trust that came from a willing Son.

Jesus addresses this final word to his Father, just like his first word from the cross. In fact, it wasn’t uncommon for Jesus to speak about or to the Father – from the time at age twelve when Jesus had to be in his Father’s house, to Maundy Thursday evening, when he prayed for his disciples, **“Father, protect them by the power of your name.”** or in the Garden of Gethsemane, **“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me.”** You see, Jesus could do that because he was the Father’s perfect Son. Jesus did the will of his Father and pleased his Father – so much so that on two different occasions God the Father actually spoke from heaven: **“This is my Son, whom I love.”**

And yet, this loving Father sent his only Son to die. He sent him from his throne in heaven to come to be born in a stable, live in lowliness and poverty and finally to suffer and die at the hands of sinful men. And at the height of that suffering, Jesus did not call out “Father, into your hands.” Instead he cried out **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** Jesus experienced firsthand what we read in the letter to the Hebrews: **“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** Jesus experienced hell, God’s righteous judgment and wrath against sin.

But Jesus had no sin. Jesus did not have a single stain, not one blemish, no mistakes, errors, faults, nothing – except: yours, mine. Jesus had no business being on a cross or being forsaken by God except that he was bearing your iniquities and my sins. We drove the wedge between Father and Son. We caused the strife and the conflict.

But did you hear what Jesus said from the cross? Did you hear him call out in a loud voice, loud enough for you to hear: “**Father, into your hands**”? How can he call on the one who abandoned him? How can he ever trust that Father again? How could Jesus expect to find comfort and consolation and rest in the Father’s hands ever again?

Unless – sin has been atoned for and price has been paid. If the price has been paid, then Jesus has no reason to be afraid and – neither do you.

Because of his suffering on the tree of Calvary, Jesus has restored the relationship – not just his relationship – but our relationship with God. We are now also sons and daughters of the Father. We can look to and speak to the Almighty God, not hiding in fear or guilt, but with a word of trust, trust in a loving Father who holds his children in the palm of his hand, and who will forever keep the promise Jesus made: “**no one can snatch them out of my father’s hand.**”

Listen to Jesus’ final words from the cross. Listen to him speak this word of trust in such a loving Father. But can you also hear what these words say about the Son? Listen to this word of trust from a willing Son.

Jesus knew that he was going to die. In fact, he very specifically told his disciples numerous times that he would die in Jerusalem at the instigation of the Jews and at the hands of the Gentiles. And it happened just as Jesus said it would; he was sentenced to die by crucifixion.

Scholars and medical experts will argue about what ultimately caused Jesus death. Did he die of suffocation? Or did his wounds and trauma to his body simply cause his heart to fail? Even if we wouldn’t know exactly how to fill out a death certificate for Jesus, we could simply say that Jesus died as a result of his crucifixion.

But at the same time we realize that Jesus – humbled though he was – was still the almighty Son of God. And as such, nothing the Jews or the Romans could have done to him would have had any power over him unless Jesus allowed it. Simply put, Jesus would not have died – could not have died – if he was not willing to die.

None of this would have happened had Jesus not been willing to come to earth and take on human flesh, or willing to serve and to love and to fulfill the Scriptures – perfectly. There would be no Good Friday if Jesus was not willing to suffer and to die.

So do you see the significance of his words? “**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.**” *Jesus* placed his life into the hands of the Father. He gave up his life willingly. Earlier, Jesus told his disciples, “**The reason the Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.**”

Jesus gave up his life so that he could also take it up again. Jesus gave up his spirit; he entrusted it to his Father, but only temporarily. He would not be dead for long.

The words that Jesus speaks, “**Into your hands I commit my spirit.**” are really a quote from the book of Psalms. Even in his death Jesus had the words of Scripture on his lips. But there’s more to it than that. Old Testament believers often used these words from Psalm 31 as an evening prayer. It was an expression of trust in God to keep them safely through the night.

Now Jesus spoke this word of trust, that death – his death – would be just like a night’s sleep. It would be temporary. It would not last.

So right here, with this word of trust from a willing Son we know that his work was complete, that sin was paid for, and that even though death would come to him very soon, death had no hold on him for he was in his Father’s hands. He committed his spirit into the hands of his Father and waited for Easter morning.

Death will some day come to each of us. And when it does, Jesus' word of trust is our word of trust. We, too, commit our bodies and our souls to the care of our heavenly Father, knowing that our Easter will also come. Just as Jesus willingly went to his death, we will follow him through death and into life.

Listen closely this afternoon to Jesus' last words from the cross. For these last words provide far more than a pleasant memory of a dead hero. Jesus' words toward his Father indicate the kind of relationship you have with your heavenly Father. This Son's willingness to die has given you life and has changed death into the gate to heaven.

Jesus, just moments from death, spoke a word of trust. And by this word he has given you the ability to speak this same word. Speak it on Good Friday and anticipate Easter. Speak it every day of your life and expect your Father's loving care. Speak it when death draws near, and await your Easter, your day of resurrection to life eternal. **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."** Amen.