"Into Thy Hands" -- Luke 23:44-46

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho
13 April Anno Domini 2001
Good Friday
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

"Deliver My Soul from the sword,
My Life from the power of the dog!
Save Me from the mouth of the lion,
My afflicted Soul
from the horns of the wild oxen!"
Psalm 22:20-21

Dear Baptized,

Nineteen days ago, the congregation celebrated one of the most astonishing and marvelous events that has ever taken place in the history of history - the Incarnation of God. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). On March 25th the Church observed "The Annunciation of Our LORD" - that stunning and astounding event that marks the personal union of the Divine and the human in the one person of Jesus Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost within the womb of Mary. Jesus is true God, begotten of His Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary (Small Catechism). The coming together of these two natures in the one person took place immediately at His conception and is described in the wonder-filled word "Incarnation." This is a bringing together or a union which is one of the foundational doctrines of Christianity.

Today is Good Friday and the Church is gathered to hear the Word concerning one of the most awe-full and inconceivable events that has ever happened, the Expiration of Emmanuel. Such a trauma is one that took place, both figuratively and literally, in the deep darkness of this world, and is, both figuratively and literally, earth quaking and rock rending. Listen carefully here. While this event does not "undo" the Incarnation by separating the two natures, there is a separation that does take place ... the separation of body and spirit. This is, according to the Sacred Scriptures, the definition of death, for God wrote of it when Solomon etched the letters: "the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God Who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Jesus Christ died and this being so, God died on the cross, for Jesus Christ is "Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting" (Athanasian Creed).

We conclude the midweek sermon series on the words that Jesus the Christ spoke from the cross. Please listen to Luke 23:44-46 under the theme of ...

"Into Thy Hands" ...

”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, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit!' And having said this He breathed His last."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

The first word from the mouth of Jesus after He was crucified is a prayer. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The last word from the mouth of Jesus is also a prayer. "Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit!"

Between these two petitions our redemption is wrought. He petitions, "Father, forgive them" and then Jesus sets about His Father's business of making a full pardon possible to any and all who had a hand in His crucifixion ... in other words, the centurion, the pharisee, you, me and every human being who ever has lived, is living or will live. A complete atonement for all sins has been accomplished by Christ. The crucified King not only cares about the entire mass, but also the individual and, as a result, He announces His individual absolution to the penitent man who was crucified with Him, "you will be with Me in Paradise."

The faithful Son provides for His mother and the disciple whom He loved. He calls John to represent Him as His mother's son and entrusts the care of His mother to this newly ordinated man. This is not unlike the Call a pastor has to care for, feed and tend the congregation of the Lord. "When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."

Then there are those additional three dark hours when the faithful Son continues to endure the consequences of man's Sin, humanity's sins and being forsaken by all that is, and He Who is, good. "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'" Then, "after this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture) ‘I thirst.' A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of vinegar on hyssop and held it to His mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, He said, ‘It is finished!'"

All was now finished and, except for one thing, everything is done. The complete atonement for the sins of the all has been made. The wrath of God has been vented on Jesus the Christ. Satan's head has been dealt a mortal, crushing blow. The sufficient Ransom has been paid. "It is finished!" With respect to the redeeming Sacrifice, the Scripture is fulfilled and there remains but one engagement - death is to be defeated, "for the last enemy to be destroyed is Death" (1 Cor. 15:26). In the plan of salvation, death must defeat death. So, in order to destroy Death, the Author of Life must die; for just as there is "no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of Blood" (Hebrews 9:22), so also there is no resurrection of the dead unless the One dies. Jesus is the One. Jesus, Who is not only true man, but also very God of very God, must die ... there must be a separation, not of the Divine and the Human natures, but of Jesus' Body and Spirit.

"Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit!' And having said this He breathed His last." It is no wonder that, at the separation of the Lord's Body and Spirit, the temple curtain was torn in two and the rocks were split! Then Joseph of Arimathea "went to Pilate and asked for the Body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud, and laid Him in a rock-hewn tomb" (Luke 23:53). However, what did not take place with the Lord's Body was any degradation, and this according to Scripture, because the LORD God would not let the "Holy One see corruption" (Psalm 16:10 & Acts 2:27).

But dear baptized, please continue to hear this Good News. At the instant of the separation of Body

and Spirit, Jesus was in the hands of the Father. His Body was left hanging on the cross, His thorn-pierced head bowed in obedience to gravity and the Father's will. Jesus' lifeless Body would soon be taken down for the Sabbath Day's rest in the tomb. But perceive this, Jesus is with His Father in Paradise! At one instant Jesus breathes His last in this world and in the next instant He is in His Father's hands. For did you think that the Father would not answer His Only-Beloved Son's perfect petition? Do you imagine that the prayer of His Son in Whom He is well pleased might go unanswered? Would the Father turn a deaf ear to the holy plea of His Chosen Who has done all things well? No.

Most certainly Jesus is with the Father at that instant. Truly the Father answered this perfect petition of His Son. Absolutely the Christ is welcomed Home to Paradise where He will now await the spirit of the one to whom He said, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." That penitent man's legs were broken that afternoon to hasten his death before the beginning of the Sabbath. He died before and his body was taken down before 6:00 pm. However, as Jesus had promised, on that day the repentant man was with Him in Paradise. There is no period of unconsciousness between time's death and eternity's life ... no dissolution of the mind ... no floating about in some never-never land ... no soul-sleep either for our Lord when He died or for those who follow Him in a death like His, namely, His followers.

Thus Stephen could pray as he was being stoned to death, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). At the instant of the separation of body and spirit, Stephen was in the hands of the Lord Jesus. His body was left pummeled under stones and would soon be put to rest in one of the cemeteries of this world where it would sleep until the Last Day. But Stephen is with Jesus and with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. At one instant Stephen breathes His last in this world and in the next instant He is with the Lord. For do you think that the Jesus would not answer His beloved Stephen's petition? ... the prayer of His disciple in whom He is well pleased? Will the Lord do less for you?

There is more to this last word from the Son. "Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit!" is a prayer of petition not only for Himself. Remember, Jesus is the High Priest Who has interceded on your behalf throughout His Life, while on the cross and especially in His last word He spoke, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit! This is a petitionary prayer on behalf of you, or "... do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His Death?" ... And "if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Romans 6:3 & 8).

All newborn soldiers of the Crucified, bear on their brows, the seal of Him Who died.

In His High Priestly Prayer, the Incarnate Son of God most certainly prayed for Himself, absolutely prayed for His disciples who had been with Him, and truly also prayed for you. Listen to His petition for you: "Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou has given Me, may be with Me where I am, to behold My Glory which Thou hast given Me in Thy love for Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). He did not stop there with His intercessory thoughts, words and deeds. While on Calvary's holy mountain and while enthroned on the altar of the cross ... even as He was dying and as death approached with its rending schism of Body and Spirit ... at the ninth hour He was in complete command and control. No one took His Life away from Him. He gave Himself for you and in taking your death upon Himself has given you His Life. Dear baptized, hear His petition one more time ...

"Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit!' And having said this He breathed His last." Amen. Lord Jesus, Into Thy hands I commend myself - my body and soul and all things. Amen.