

'Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit'

Luke 23:46

Bible Verse(s):

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.

Reflection:

After Jesus' triumphal cry of "It is finished", recorded by John, Luke captures this phrase as Jesus final farewell to the earth. For me, it seems to almost separate the physical from the spiritual, as he prepares to now go home to his heavenly Father. He understands that he has completed all that was asked of Him, the price paid, the atonement satisfied, He is now set free to return to His Father.

There has been a lot of speculation about the actual physical cause of Jesus death; crucifixion was a deliberate long drawn out and very cruel death, often taking days to complete. As it was a religious festival the next day the soldiers came to break the legs of those crucified, but when they approached Jesus, they discovered that he had already died. Luke tells us that he died after uttering this verse and handing himself deliberately back to his Father.

These words set a model prayer for each of us at the hour of our death, voluntarily setting free our spirit.

In Philippians Chapter 2 we read "Jesus didn't take advantage of the fact that he was equal with God. Instead, he made himself as nothing. He did this by taking on the nature of a servant. He was made just like human beings. He appeared as a man. He was humble and obeyed God completely. He did this even though it led to his death. Even worse, he died on a cross!

Michel Quoist wrote the following:

Just a few hours more, a few minutes more...

For thirty-three years it has been going on. Thirty-three years you have lived fully minute after minute, but now you are at the last extremity, the edge of a precipice, about to take the last step.

You hesitate,

Three hours are long, three hours of agony;

Longer than thirty-three years...

You must decide, Lord, all is ready,

You are there, motionless on your Cross.

You have renounced all activity other than embracing these crossed planks for which you were made.

And yet, there is still life in your nailed body.

Let mortal flesh die and make way for eternity.

Now, life slips from each limb, one by one, finding refuge in his still beating heart.

Immeasurable heart,
Overflowing heart
Heavy heart, heavy as the world, the world of sin and miseries that it bears.

Lord one more effort,
Lord save us.
See,

Alone betwixt heaven and earth,
In that awesome moment,
He has gathered his life,
He has gathered the sin of the world,
And in a cry,
He has given *all*.

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”
Christ dies for each of us, that we might LIVE.

Whilst we live through this global pandemic and hear life and death discussed so freely, it is too easy to think of that act of God’s love for us as academic or theoretic, as though we are looking through the wrong end of a telescope. So far away, so distant, that for many in the face of this terrible disease it seems little comfort or relevance. Isaiah’s Man of sorrows acquainted with grief (Isa. 52:13 -53:5) obviously speaks of Jesus and his crucifixion, but also perhaps speaks for all those who suffer now, especially who suffer alone where “*people screen their faces and take no account*”. In all the heartbreak, fear and pain of this COVID-19 pandemic our God is still in the midst, beyond the PPE equipment, beyond the rules and regulations of lock-down and self-isolation, in the nurse who worked the front line and now has it herself, in the young teenage man struggling to breathe, in the 80 year old woman quietly dying without family and friends, I believe that God is there in Jesus His son, reliving that moment betwixt heaven and earth, calling for His spirit to be reunited with that of God his heavenly Father.

There is a very real sense I think that the redemptive act of Jesus is an ongoing drama in which we are all players. At the heart of the mystery of suffering Sheila Cassidy suggests that through redemption there is, if we can but look, a grace that sustains sufferers and carers alike. It comes as freely and as surely as the sunrise, piercing the blackness of grief and despair, restoring once again the hope of things unseen.

Our spirit cries out, Father into your hands we place our selves and all those we love.

Amen.