

Good Friday  
April 19, 2019  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Bend

Isaiah 52:13—53:12  
Psalm 22  
Hebrews 10:16-25  
John 18:1—19:42

According to John, the very last words Jesus spoke from the cross were: “It is finished.”

And the record goes on from there to say, “then [Jesus] bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). Or, as the old King James Version of the Bible puts it, he “gave up the ghost.”

In this instance, the old language of the King James Bible seems fresh and clear. By comparison, our modern translation seems soft, poetic ... and consequently, at least in my hearing of it, it loses an edge. To say that Jesus “bowed his head and gave up his spirit” seems almost gentle. The violence is softened.

It all means the same, of course, but the blunt way of putting it has an air of finality to it that suits the day: he “gave up the ghost.”

The stark phrase suggests that there came a time, even for Jesus, when there was nothing else to be done. He, the Word of God, “became flesh and dwelt among us.” He lived with us, teaching us, walking in our midst, loving us, feeding us ... with healing in both his words and his touch.

And the word of grace he brought to us would either take root in us or not. Either way, he was done. Completely done.

And maybe, in that moment on the cross, Jesus accepted the hard truth that all that he had come to do for us was “finished.” There was nothing more for him to do. So he just “gave up the ghost.” Maybe.

Luke’s account of that moment is remarkably similar. Luke says that Jesus’ last words were: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” [And] having said this, he breathed his last.”

It’s a remarkably similar account, as I said, and yet I hear a subtle, but critically-important clarification in those words. As Luke tells it, Jesus didn’t merely “give up” at the end of that horrific day. At the end of what others would see as an apparently tragic, wasted life, Jesus didn’t give up; instead, he gave everything over to God: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

I hear trust in those words, a confidence borne not of himself but of the God who loved him.

At his baptism, the heavens were torn open and a voice announced, “You are my Son, the Beloved ...”

And I think the echoes of that announcement formed the core of his identity and the whole of his ministry. I think the echoes of that announcement *in*-formed his every waking moment, every story he told about God, every deed he carried out in the name of God ... from beginning to end. And accordingly, Jesus' dying moment, it seems to me, was filled with the same trust and intimacy that marked every one of his living moments.

At the end, I hear Jesus turn his spirit, the whole of his life, over to God, not merely resigned to the reality that his life was finished, but trusting that he had done enough, and that God could take all that he had done and use it to heal and mend a broken world.

From time to time, I am asked to officiate at a graveside burial. On some of those occasions, I've read a few lines from a poem that I know will be familiar to some of you. It's a Mary Oliver poem called "In Blackwater Woods." The last lines from that poem read:

To live in this world  
you must be able  
to do three things:  
to love what is mortal;  
to hold it  
against your bones knowing  
your own life depends on it;  
and, when the time comes to let it go,  
to let it go.

There's a poignant wisdom in those verses. In order to "live in this world," as she puts it, we need to do those three things: we need to "love what is mortal"; we need to "hold it" deeply, and, yes, at the end, we need to "let it go."

The thing is, I'm not sure I can "let go" – I'm not sure any of us can – unless we can first find a way to entrust all that is so precious to us in this life into the hands of the God who created us out of love at the start, the God who formed us for love over the course of our lives, and the God who enfolds us in love in the end.

Sandy Hampton is a retired bishop. He came out of retirement to serve an interim time in the Diocese of Oregon. It was a challenging and often overwhelming time. And in that challenging and overwhelming time, he shared with some of us what he described as his favorite prayer, a prayer that Pope John XXIII supposedly prayed every night: "It's your church, God. I'm going to bed." It's a bit whimsical, perhaps, but it's also the kind of prayer that any of us could only pray if we're confident that our offering of the day is enough for God, that there isn't more that we could have done, should have done – or even if there is more than we could have done, should have done, to trust that the love of God will accept back from us the day that has been, and use it according to God's loving will for us.

I'm reminded of another prayer, this one from the New Zealand Prayer Book's service of Night Prayers. There are a couple of lines in that prayer that admit that there comes a time when we can do no more:

What has been done has been done;  
what has not been done has not been done.

Let it be.

I was struck by the poignancy of those lines the first time I heard them. We all hit that time at the end of every day. And we will, each of us, hit that time in a final way at the end of our last day on earth, as well.

But that's not the end of the prayer; it's just a pause. The prayer goes on to encourage us to look past our endings and to look ahead. The prayer trusts an uncertain future into the hands of the God of all our days and nights, all our endings and every new beginning. In its own way, it is an invitation to us to follow the example of Jesus, commending our spirit, our life, our all, into God's hands, trusting that the God who made us and loves us will treasure the gift of our daily living, the gift of our very lives in the end.

I want to close these reflections with that prayer this day, pausing in the middle, but only before continuing on to the end that reminds us to commend ourselves to God eternal care:

Lord it is night.

The night is for stillness.  
Let us be still in the presence of God.

It is night after a long day.  
What has been done has been done;  
what has not been done has not been done.

Let it be.

The night is dark.  
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you.

The night is quiet.  
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us, all dear to us, and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.  
Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys, new possibilities.

In your name we pray.  
Amen.