

Luke 23: 44-49 – Into your hands I commit my spirit (from Psalm 31)

Read Psalm 31:1-5

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Jesus last words are profound. They come from Psalm 31 where they are a response to a faithful God who is a refuge to those who take shelter within it, a rescuer to those in need of deliverance, and a guide to those who are beset all around by traps and snares. To pray “into your hands I commit my spirit” is to pray “deliver me, Lord, my faithful God” – the two aspects go together like breathing in and breathing out.

So Jesus last words are profound because they were on his final breath. To commit himself to his faithful God and Father was his final action. In the darkness of the cross, where even the sun could no longer bear to shine on such a pitiful and horrid place, where the Son of God hung dying, counted among the criminals; even there Jesus affirmed the faithfulness of his Father, God.

Could it be that Jesus, had been reciting Psalm 31 to himself as he waited to die? Maybe take it home and read it fully. It’s not like Jesus wouldn’t have known it. Could it be that Jesus had situated himself as the sufferer in the Psalm and this was his way through the agony – to trust in the faithfulness of God.

Could it be that the Roman Centurion, probably with little knowledge of the Jewish Psalms, just heard Jesus commit himself to his God and recognised the righteousness in that act of faith, the same act of faith that others see in us when we trust God and affirm his faithfulness to us.

Could it be that the others gathered there beat their breasts and turned away because they heard and recognised that even though they had tortured Jesus, bled him, scarred him, mocked him; even though there was no hope for him in this dark place; even through all this, with disbelief they heard the words of Psalm 31 on his lips. They didn’t get the blasphemous recanting, the angry railing against God, or the shameful begging that they hoped for and expected. Instead they received the words of faith in a God who delivers. They turned away, shamed themselves; the light of God’s gaze cutting into them even in the darkness and guilt pricking them. Could it be that they couldn’t stay, because they didn’t know how to process what they had seen and heard?

Could it be that those who knew him, watching in horror in the distance, somehow picked up what was said over the breeze? Jesus’s loud voice carrying even to them. Perhaps it was a challenge to them – if the dying man can trust God’s faithfulness, why can’t they? They were going to need to trust God over the next few days. And as the sun came out and the body was removed; as it seemed more and more like a horrible dream; these friends of Jesus would return to his words again and again. Maybe if the man on the cross can trust God to the last, so can we?

Finally, could it be, that we, who watch from the distance of 2000 years, can still catch the echo of Jesus’ words? Could it be that this challenge is one for us too. Could it be that as a curate looking for a job, the challenge for me is to trust in God as my guide to keep me safe from traps and snares? Could it be that one of us who feels trapped by work or a family circumstance can trust God to be our rescuer and deliverer? Could it be that one of us who feels isolated and alone can trust God to be our refuge and stronghold and shelter? Could it be that this final breath of Jesus, this profound

echo in the dark, may be to each one of us a chink of light – the light of God shining his faithfulness into each of our circumstances? I pray it is and I pray we have the faith to see it.

Amen.