

WORDS FROM THE CROSS: Lenten week 6  
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Psalm 42, John 19:28-30, Luke 23:43-47  
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## Psalm 42

<sup>1</sup> As the deer pants for streams of water,  
    so my soul pants for you, my God.  
<sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
    When can I go and meet with God?  
<sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food  
    day and night,  
while people say to me all day long,  
    “Where is your God?”  
<sup>4</sup> These things I remember  
    as I pour out my soul:  
how I used to go to the house of God  
    under the protection of the Mighty One<sup>[d]</sup>  
with shouts of joy and praise  
    among the festive throng.  
<sup>5</sup> Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
    Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
    for I will yet praise him,  
    my Savior and my God.  
<sup>6</sup> My soul is downcast within me;  
    therefore I will remember you  
from the land of the Jordan,  
    the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.  
<sup>7</sup> Deep calls to deep  
    in the roar of your waterfalls;  
all your waves and breakers  
    have swept over me.  
<sup>8</sup> By day the LORD directs his love,  
    at night his song is with me—  
    a prayer to the God of my life.  
<sup>9</sup> I say to God my Rock,  
    “Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I go about mourning,  
    oppressed by the enemy?”  
<sup>10</sup> My bones suffer mortal agony  
    as my foes taunt me,  
saying to me all day long,  
    “Where is your God?”  
<sup>11</sup> Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
    Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
    for I will yet praise him,  
    my Savior and my God.

John 19:28-30

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."<sup>29</sup> A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.<sup>30</sup> When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Luke 23:43-47

<sup>44</sup>It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon,<sup>45</sup> for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.<sup>46</sup> Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."<sup>[e]</sup> When he had said this, he breathed his last.

PRAY.

During this season of Lent, we have placed ourselves at the foot of the cross in a posture of listening...listening to the crowd...to the thieves on the crosses beside Jesus's. But the center of our attention, our listening, is the words of Jesus.

Jesus first speaks to his Father about forgiveness, he quotes Psalm 22, he offers hope to the thief, speaks lovingly to his mother and disciple John. Now he speaks of his own bodily need.

Today: **I thirst.** It is finished. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Think of a time when you were really, really thirsty.

When our sons were about 11 and 14 they accompanied Rob and me on a mission trip to Mazatlan, Mexico. All of us participated in a vision and dental clinic in a poor suburb of the town. You may be aware that in some countries it is not a good idea to drink the tap water, because of the real possibility of water borne parasites, and so on. While we were there, bottled water was always provided for us, however Adam discovered that the Coca Cola bottling company sells a product in Mexico called Manzana. It is like a sparkling apple cider drink. It became his beverage of choice! He loved it so much that with his own money he bought a six pack and managed to bring two bottles—yes glass bottles—back with him to Seattle. He lovingly placed them in the refrigerator upon our return home.

About a week later, he drank the first one.

A few weeks after that I noticed the second empty bottle sitting on the counter. But Adam was not at home. I asked Chris if he knew anything about that empty bottle, and he admitted drinking it.

“What? What were you thinking???”

“But I was *thirsty*, Mom.”

“You know that was Adam’s! You have between now and the time Adam gets home, to figure out what you are going to say to him. I am not going to intervene unless your life is in danger!”

I couldn’t believe it. I was afraid that when Adam got home, world war three would start. It didn’t. We all survived to tell the tale.

Chris was thirsty! A drink of water would have been a MUCH better idea!

What was the cause of your thirst? Why were you given to this very basic need and focused on getting it met?

Apparently after Hurricane Katrina, there was a shortage of potable water. The mayor made getting clean drinking water a priority, for he was told: “If you don’t, the damage done by Katrina will be nothing in comparison to what will happen if the people don’t have water.”

Without water, we will die. Jesus has been dying for hours...his life energy is slipping away. Under the circumstances, his body would be dehydrated.

For what is Jesus thirsting?

Yes; Jesus had a body like yours or mine. He thirsts for water, and is given a very poor substitute in vinegar or sour wine. (Thanks, people.)

I wonder if Jesus is not thirsting for something else...something the psalmist alludes to in Psalm 42:

<sup>1</sup> As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, my God.

<sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?

Built into our human DNA, is a deep-seated desire to be in a relationship with our Creator. This “thirst” is one we seek to satisfy in a variety of ways—some ways are healthier than others, some are more satisfying than others.

Saint Augustine, one of the early church Fathers, said it this way:

“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”

Jesus, made an offer to the thirsty woman at a well (John 4), an offer that she could not refuse, when he said:

<sup>13</sup> ... “Everyone who drinks this [well] water will be thirsty again,<sup>14</sup> but **whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the**

**water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

Perhaps there is some irony in this? The One who offers living water is now thirsty...

All of our thirsts, all of our appetites will be fully satisfied in relationship to the Creator, the Living God.

**"It is finished."**

Perhaps you have had a project that required months, perhaps even years of study, effort, and plain old hard work. When it was finally brought to completion, do you remember the feeling of accomplishment? The feeling that may well have accompanied the words: "Finally. Done. Finished. It is over. Complete."

A friend of mine is a writer. When she sends her final, edited manuscript back, so it can go to print, there is a sense of completion.

Another friend decided to finish her college degree and get a teaching credential, when she was 50 years old. She completed all the course work over several years, while working full time. You can imagine her relief and joy when she reached her goal! Elation! Graduation! Celebration!

Imagine when Michelangelo completed painting the Sistine Chapel...

When Handel finished composing "The Messiah".

The previous week has been a roller coaster of highs and lows for Jesus:

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the celebration of the Passover, the betrayal of Judas, the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, mock trials, beatings, the denial of Peter and desertion of the disciples, then the hours of suffering the most excruciating pain of crucifixion.

This was not the first time Jesus' life was on the line. It could have ended much earlier. Shortly after his birth, Herod ordered the death of all male children two years of age and younger. Jesus' parents became refugees with him, in order to save his life. He could have died in the wilderness during his temptation (Matthew 4). There were subsequent plots against him, and on one occasion, he was nearly stoned to death (John 8:58-59).

Now, on the cross, Jesus declares: "It is finished."

**Not, "I am finished". "It is finished."** To what does Jesus refer? The work for which Jesus was destined—the purpose for which Jesus came—it is finished. All is accomplished. These are not words of defeat, they are words of victory!

"It is finished!" Three words in English. One word in the original language as Jesus declared it. "And on that one word hangs the uniqueness of the

Christian message. Because **it is the Christian gospel alone which says that salvation is not a matter of *what you can do* to please God and deserve his favor; no, it is what God has already done to save you and his whole world.**"

(p.97, *The Cross is Still Good News*, by Christopher J. H. Wright)

Discipleship is **not** first a matter of our doing something for God, but a matter of having something done for us by God. (W. Willimon, p.63)

To the eyes of the world, Jesus is the consummate victim. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesus has accomplished what we ourselves could not.

Jesus said:

<sup>15</sup> ... I lay down my life for the sheep.. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." (John 10:15-18 NIV)

**Salvation. It is finished—all is accomplished—paid for. It is ours, as a free gift to be received, by God's grace and mercy.** Earlier Jesus had said to his disciples: " ... <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28

**This was Jesus' purpose in coming: to give his life a ransom for many.**

**Jesus has finally accomplished his purpose.**

**This is why we call Good Friday, good.**

*The Friday victory is the defeat of the power of death: that power that reveals itself in selfishness, pettiness, hostility, violence, greed and anxiety. It is now robbed of its power because Jesus' way of suffering love prevails.*

*The Friday victory is the defeat of the Roman empire and all human empires that depend on muscle and militarism. These cannot destroy the power of infinite love.*

*The Friday victory is a defeat of fear, guilt, shame; Friday is the victory of love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, generosity. (idea source: W. Brueggemann, Into Your Hand, p. 30-33)*

**The power of death has done its best, but it could not overcome the power of God in the person of Jesus Christ. It is finished, but it is not over!**

**Jesus' final words are a prayer to his Heavenly Father.** Jesus' prayer bears similarities to a familiar prayer often taught to children, a prayer that dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. You know it, say it with me:

"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord, my soul to take."

**Jesus prays: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."**

In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for "breathe" is the same word for "spirit". The majority of us, for the majority of the time, our autonomic nervous systems keep our hearts pumping blood and our lungs inhaling and exhaling. Usually no conscious effort is required on our part.

In the ancient world breath was understood as a gift from God. It is not our possession. How long can we 'possess' or hold our breath? Our older son Chris plays the saxophone, and he used to have contests with his fellow musicians, to see who among them could hold their breath the longest. Who had the greatest lung capacity? They got pretty good at holding their breath, but inevitably they always had to exhale and breathe again!

**Jesus' readiness to give up his breath indicates a readiness to die.** Until his final moment, he is in charge of his life. Now Jesus trusts himself to the Father. Jesus had accomplished his purpose, he had been obedient.

This yielding of one's life stands in sharp contrast to our culture's death denying attitude. We will do most anything to fend off death. This attitude is obvious in our quest to stay forever young: the pursuit of physical fitness and consuming the best diet; constant commercials hocking cosmetics and surgery that will keep one's appearance from aging; the quest for financial security and the accumulation of material goods; and our striving to be self-sufficient and the various forms that may take.

While being prudent in these concerns is good stewardship of the gifts that God gives, at the same time our efforts in these areas can belie our lack of complete trust in God. "Just in case God is not good, I need to take care of myself." "Just in case, God is not able to supply my needs, I better do it."

**Jesus exemplifies complete trust as he yields his life to God. "Into your hands I commit my spirit."** Recently a colleague of mine (in California) had to undergo serious open-heart surgery. Just before being wheeled into the operating room, he assured his wife, "No matter what happens, I know I'll see you again." Sadly, Dave died during surgery, yet he had committed his spirit to the Lord. And as much as he is missed, *we will see him again*. I think of Lauren Hardman, having liver transplant surgery at this very moment. Their times are in God's hands. Our confession affirms this truth: In life and in death we belong to God!

Psalm 31 describes Jesus' confidence, even on the cross:

<sup>13</sup> ... **They conspire against me  
and plot to take my life.**

<sup>14</sup> **But I trust in you, LORD;  
I say, "You are my God."**

<sup>15</sup> **My times are in your hands;**  
deliver me from the hands of my enemies,  
from those who pursue me.

<sup>16</sup> Let your face shine on your servant;  
save me in your unfailing love.

Contrary to all that had happened in the days leading up to the crucifixion, Jesus can say, nevertheless, **"I trust you, Lord. You are my God. My times are in your hands..."**

Hands are an image of power. My times are in your power. I commend my life to your power. In this expression, both the Psalmist and Jesus are relinquishing with confidence, their very selves to God who gave them breath in the first place.

**Those present at the cross, responded in different ways:**

*A Roman soldier* announces, "This was God's son."

*The crowds* who shouted "Crucify him" now beat their breasts, as it is now clear that, caught up in a mob mentality, they urged the execution of an innocent man.

*Jesus' followers*, "watched these things". Incredulous. But they knew that something momentous and unprecedented was happening before their very eyes. (W. Brueggemann, p.35-40 [Into Your Hand](#))

**"I thirst." "It is finished." "Into your hands I commit my spirit."**

**Let us take a few moments for personal reflection.**

For what do you hunger and thirst? What appetites motivate you and how do you satisfy them? Are these merely physical "thirsts" or something much deeper?

In whose hands are your times and mine? The hand of fear, anxiety, greed, anger, guilt, or---- (you fill in the blank). OR are your times and mine in the hands of love, mercy, justice, or generosity?

How will you and I respond to this gift of God, this self-giving of Jesus who died for you and for me?

PRAY.