



“THE PASSING OF THE SPIRIT”
SERMON FOR GOOD FRIDAY – TENEBRAE
REV. BRADLEY L. DEHAVEN
ST. ANDREW’S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS
FRIDAY, MARCH 25, 2005

LUKE 23:44-46

These three short verses, buried in the midst of the passion narrative of Luke’s Gospel, may seem at the outset as most insignificant. Three short verses that would signify the very last breath of the Human Jesus. I had heard these words all my life, but never really fully in any sort of definitive context – until I read them here.

My mother and her mother used to have a saying; whenever something had finally quit working, or had totally malfunctioned, they would say that it just “gave up the ghost.” It was as if the Spirit of the thing had departed from the object for the last time, and there it sat, empty, life-less, without purpose. How many automobile graveyards have we sauntered past, glancing over to see the heaps of dead, decaying cars? How many graveyards have we passed, casually glimpsing at the cold stone markers that seem to line up, row by row, as if at eternal attention? But merrily we go about our lives, without scarcely another thought.

So, the washing machine has died. It has given up the ghost. It’s beyond repair, and there’s no more life left in it to salvage. Time to get a new one.

The car finally died for the last time. We’ve been babying it along for too long now. It is time to bite the bullet and get a new one.

But this time, this time it is different. It isn’t a machine that has died. It isn’t a thing that we can replace. And this time, he has given up the ghost. He has commended his spirit back to God, and has breathed his last.

Every year we talk about the significance of the Spirit of God. We say around Pentecost that the Spirit of God is the same Spirit that was used to breathe life into Adam in the creation narratives. Every year we say that this same Spirit is the breath of God that has been given to the early Church – Pentecost, the Holy Spirit. Spirit, Wind, Breath. They all come from the same word – Ruach. The same spirit, the same wind that swept across the face of the earth in creation, the same spirit that parted the Red Sea, the same spirit that descended like a dove when Jesus came up out of the Baptismal waters of the Jordan River, this same spirit is the spirit Jesus is giving back to God. Commending it; literally, to entrust to or put in the care of another. Jesus is giving his spirit back to God. In the purest, holiest, most honest sense of the words, Jesus is giving up the ghost.

And we are left behind, at the foot of the cross. At the door to the tomb. At the graveyard, with an empty cross, and a life-less body of the one we thought was going to be THE ONE. And oh, weren’t those expectations foolish! We wanted to change the world! We wanted to put down all oppressors! We wanted to see our side win JUST ONCE! We wanted to be on the side of victory! And now this!

In a sweeping movement of catastrophe, Jesus went from a hometown hero in a parade just a few short days ago, to the despised and rejected suffering criminal on the cross. How did it ever get so out of control? How did it go so wrong so fast? How?

And now, he has died. He commended his spirit back to God, breathed his last, and has died. Lest we forget, we are the ones who put him there. Don’t deny it. Even our denying it is proof of our guilt – the same guilt that put him up there. You can’t pawn this off on those folks in the crowds earlier in the courtyard. You can’t even pawn this off on Pontius Pilate. You can’t do it. Our self-centeredness, our ego-centric ways. Our selfish desires – we don’t need God! Ah, that was the

greatest sin – the sin of believing that we didn't need GOD. We were perfectly happy as long as we were in control. We could handle most anything that came down the pike. We were confident. We were self-assured. We...we... we...

And that's why he's there now. Dead. No more spirit left in him. Life-less, bloody mess of what used to be a man. Take him down, take him down and bury him. As he so aptly said, "It is finished."

Or is it? Didn't he say something about a Spirit that would come from God? Didn't he say something about reminding us of all that was said? Didn't he? Maybe this all had to happen...Maybe this is the passing of the Spirit, not just from his body, but the beginning of something more...

Maybe that's what Isaiah was trying to say. "He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account." Those three short verses. That's all. Just those three short verses. And it is finished. May God have mercy on his soul.

And ours. Amen.