

The Cross: Week 7

Lydia Shiu | Daily Bible Guide | 2020

Monday, April 6

Luke 23:44-49(NRSV)

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." ⁴⁸ And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Points of Interest

- This week's Last Word of the Seven Last Words of Jesus is, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit." On the final week of our Bible Guide, in the midst of the state of the world right now, we look at this phrase of humble surrender with wonder and awe. What would it look like to surrender, relinquish control, to let go with trust, faith, and hope, especially in times of fear, in the face of death?
- What is surrender? In a world marked by hierarchical order, surrender can sound like putting up a white flag, or giving up. However, Jesus' word of surrender is marked not by yielding or abandonment, but rather a strength to embrace. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention the "loud cry" before his last breath. Some have taken Jesus' words as a cue to his voluntary choice to take his last breath. Here, Jesus shows us surrender that is a choice to release, a step into liberation, an intentional cry and jump into union with God. What would it look like to see surrender as a form of union rather than submission? Surrender is not accepting loss, but releasing ourselves into the strong hand of God who catches us, lifts us up, and embraces us into the great Love.
- How can we reframe 'surrender' beyond languages of patriarchy and colonialism, (i.e. hierarchical thinking, win vs lose, strong or weak, etc)? How can we sophisticate our faith from simple thoughts of, 'let go and let God' as a form of shrugging off or falling into despair, but as a way toward stronger hold onto hope, a protest against "oh well!" or "what can I do?"? What would it look like to consider surrender not as the ceasing of the will to swim, but as standing our spirit up to ride the wave of the great Holy Spirit?

A Direction for Prayer

There are so many of us that are facing fear, anxiety, and death right now. In such times, an unhelpful form of surrender can feel helpless, hopeless, and overwhelming. Or some of us go the other way -- trying to control, frantically attempting to manage our surroundings or people, or focusing our energy toward those in power to blame. Let us pray for surrender rooted in trust, hope, and faith. Let us pray for surrender that draws us out of despair of darkness and into basking in the light of hope. Let us pray for surrender that opens us into full liberation. Let us pray for surrender that will lift us up to fluid flow, into the buoyancy of the river of grace and mercy. Father, *into your hands*, not void or chaos, but *into your hands*, into your embrace, into your loving care, I commit my spirit. Amen.

Spiritual Exercise of the Week

Into Your Hands – Sit in a comfortable position and let your hands come into a gentle cradle on your lap. As if you were going to scoop up some water from a spring. Ponder upon your hands slowly and carefully. *What are they carrying these days? How does it feel to carry these things? How are your hands? How is your heart? How is your spirit?* Bring your hands up a bit closer to your face, as if you're washing your face. Look upon your hands tenderly and with compassion for all that you carry. *This is what has been given to you for now. Carry on.* Now, lift your hand up to the sky as you raise your gaze. Open your hand up and your arms open wide, like Jesus' hands and arms on the cross. Look up and say, "*Into your Hands, I commit my spirit.*" Say it a few times. Rinse and repeat as needed. :)

Tuesday, April 7

Today we offer to you a short poem by Padraig O'Tuama to supplement our Bible readings. It is a response to Jesus' peace and offerings of peace, even in his turmoil and sufferings. It can be found in Padraig's short book [Daily Prayer with the Corrymeala Community](#).

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." John 14:27

Jesus, you shared peace
around a table of anxiety,
peace with the bread, peace with the wine,
peace in the face of the uncertain,
peace in the place of pain.
May we share tables to peace
in places of pain,
sharing food and friendship
and words and life.
Because you came to a fearful world
and found your place
around those tables.
Amen.

Points of Interest

- Peace amidst times of anxiety seems like a paradox. Yet this is what Jesus offers to us, especially in the midst of anxiety. Peace during the good times would not be difficult. But Jesus offered "peace in the face of the uncertain". This is the strength of Christ's peace in the face of fear and troubles.
- Peace, much like surrender, does not mean disengagement or inaction. It doesn't mean just smiling on as if nothing has happened, ignoring the problems. Jesus sat down with anxiety. He faced them and spent time with them. He interacted with those who were distraught, angry, and confused. But Jesus did not absorb all this and relay it to others around him. Jesus didn't exacerbate the anxiety. He sat them down and simply offered them peace.
- Have you found "peace in the places of pain"? What was that like?
- What would it look like to come "around a table of anxiety" with peace? What would it look like to create space, a container, hospitality to our anxieties, uncertainty, and pain? How can we invite those parts of us with fear and anxiety to come and sit down and nourish them with the presence of Jesus and his peace? Imagine sitting down at a banquet table, lavished with food and wine and flowers, with your fears and your anxieties, and with Jesus.

A Direction for Prayer

Think of friends, colleagues, or neighbors who may be struggling with anxiety. Especially in times of heightened stress in our world, pray for miraculous moments of peace and comfort to them. Pray for good resources, treatments, and practices for those who have to work hard to sustain their mental health. Imagine the divine presence of Christ's peace next to them, calming their fears, fading their anxieties, bringing them to a whole and connected sense of self with the Prince of Peace. Amen.

Spiritual Exercise of the Week

Into Your Hands – Sit in a comfortable position and let your hands come into a gentle cradle on your lap. As if you were going to scoop up some water from a spring. Ponder upon your hands slowly and carefully. *What are they carrying these days? How does it feel to carry these things? How are your hands? How is your heart? How is your spirit?* Bring your hands up a bit closer to your face, as if you're washing your face. Look upon your hands tenderly and with compassion for all that you carry. *This is what has been given to you for now. Carry on.* Now, lift your hand up to the sky as you raise your gaze. Open your hand up and your arms open wide, like Jesus' hands and arms on the cross. Look up and say, *"Into your Hands, I commit my spirit."* Say it a few times. Rinse and repeat as needed. :)

Wednesday, April 8

Psalm 31 (NRSV)

- ¹ In you, O Lord, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.
- ² Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.
- ³ You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,
- ⁴ take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.
- ⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.
- ⁶ You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols,
but I trust in the Lord.
- ⁷ I will exult and rejoice in your steadfast love,
because you have seen my affliction;
you have taken heed of my adversities,
- ⁸ and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy;
you have set my feet in a broad place.
- ⁹ Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.
- ¹⁰ For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.
- ¹¹ I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.
- ¹² I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;
I have become like a broken vessel.
- ¹³ For I hear the whispering of many—
terror all around!—
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.
- ¹⁴ But I trust in you, O Lord;
I say, "You are my God."
- ¹⁵ My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
- ¹⁶ Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.
- ¹⁷ Do not let me be put to shame, O Lord,
for I call on you;
let the wicked be put to shame;
let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.
- ¹⁸ Let the lying lips be stilled
that speak insolently against the righteous

with pride and contempt.
¹⁹ O how abundant is your goodness
that you have laid up for those who fear you,
and accomplished for those who take refuge in you,
in the sight of everyone!
²⁰ In the shelter of your presence you hide them
from human plots;
you hold them safe under your shelter
from contentious tongues.
²¹ Blessed be the Lord,
for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me
when I was beset as a city under siege.
²² I had said in my alarm,
“I am driven far from your sight.”
But you heard my supplications
when I cried out to you for help.
²³ Love the Lord, all you his saints.
The Lord preserves the faithful,
but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.
²⁴ Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
all you who wait for the Lord.

Points of Interest

- I love the realness of the psalms. They don't shy away from saying extreme things because it might sound faithless or heretical. The prayer oscillates between anguish and hope, like most of us do. Prayers that are only filled with positivity and full of confident faith are not everyday prayers because life is hard and complicated. Prayers to God don't have to be only gratitude and praise, assured with hope. God can handle real, open, honest conversations with us. This psalm shows us that. There is dynamic energy and movement to the psalmist's heart. It's filled with emotion, pain, grief, and with wonder, power, and strength.
- Verses 9-13 are so heavy and raw. Read it again. "I am in distress... sorrow... grief... anguish... groaning... 'Terror on every side!'" The days certainly can feel like this in shadowed times of suffering or in liminal spaces of unknown. And yet in verse 14, the psalm takes a drastic turn. "But I trust in you, Lord; I say, 'You are my God.'" It suddenly sounds confident, making a proclamation of faith, full of hope. And then, it is still mixed in with anger and resentment in v. 17, "let the wicked be put to shame: let them go dumbfounded to Sheol." Sheol, a dark place where the spirits of the dead go. (It's also been translated into Greek as 'Hades'.) The psalmist wishes their enemy to go to hell? Wow, how unchristian! I find comfort and encouragement that such prayers of lament, unholy like mine sometimes, are in the Bible. That I too, am not ashamed of having "bad" thoughts sometimes.

- Jesus' words, "Into your hand I commit my spirit," may come from this psalm. Although it's not directly referred to in Matthew or Mark, Luke recognized it as a reference to Psalm 31, which Jesus must have known. Jesus may have resonated with this particular movement in the psalm, filled with both agony and trust. Jesus, having lived through life on this earth, knows the full extent of our deep sorrows and highest of joys. In Jesus, not only do we see an example of a person whose devotion and connection with God is solid, but we also see a God who sympathizes with us and suffers just like us--both. This last word of Jesus is not meant to only show us that, see, Jesus fully surrendered to God therefore we must surrender to God, but rather that in the midst of facing suffering and death, Jesus shows us a way toward liberation and freedom in God.

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for those you might not be able to directly help. Commit them into God's hands. When we are feeling helpless, when we can't fix the situation, when we don't have control over what happens--commit them into God's hands. When we can't understand what's happening, when another's problem is not yours to take, when you feel restless and anxious but it's not time to act--commit them into God's hands.

Spiritual Exercise of the Week

Into Your Hands – Sit in a comfortable position and let your hands come into a gentle cradle on your lap. As if you were going to scoop up some water from a spring. Ponder upon your hands slowly and carefully. *What are they carrying these days? How does it feel to carry these things? How are your hands? How is your heart? How is your spirit?* Bring your hands up a bit closer to your face, as if you're washing your face. Look upon your hands tenderly and with compassion for all that you carry. *This is what has been given to you for now. Carry on.* Now, lift your hand up to the sky as you raise your gaze. Open your hand up and your arms open wide, like Jesus' hands and arms on the cross. Look up and say, *"Into your Hands, I commit my spirit."* Say it a few times. Rinse and repeat as needed. :)

Thursday, April 9

Psalm 23

¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
³ he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.
⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

Points of Interest

- This is one of the most beloved psalms in the Bible. God as our Shepherd has been one of the most central metaphors for our relationship with God. It connotes safety, tenderness, and protection. Metaphors paint a picture of how it feels, “green pastures... still waters...” It’s a prayer, poem, a confession of God’s faithfulness.
- “I shall not want” can also be translated as “I shall not lack.” And the rest of the psalm goes on to describe all the things that he is not lacking. (I didn’t understand this when I was younger. “Why does he not want the shepherd?!” Poems are hard to understand, especially translated from another language!)
- One of my favorite things I gained when I studied this text in its original language was the nuance of the word “follow” in verse 6. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,” is lovely, but the word “follow” sounds a bit passive in English. The word is actually closer to “pursue” or even “chase”! And also the word “mercy” can also be translated as “compassion” or “loving-kindness” So, God’s goodness and loving-kindness, not only tags along after you but sees to it that you are pursued and caught in it!
- Following the week’s theme of surrender, I’d like to make the connection that being in God’s loving hands is not a passive act. Because God’s hands are a resting refuge but also a place of strength, of nourishment, energizing us and shaping us into God’s beloved

children that can't help but run into the safe loving arms of God. In God's hands, goodness and love picks us up and twirls us around. And even in the midst of dark days, we can't help but giggle with glee in the strong hands of God who holds us up with God's mighty hands.

A Direction for Prayer

Think of those who are especially walking through dark valleys right now. Imagine the goodness and mercy of God showering and covering them completely. Picture them in your mind and "pray" with your imagination-- as they are anointed with oil, their cup is poured with delicious drink from God to the brim, and see them eat and drink with delight. Imagine God's big hug chasing them, playing with them, tumbling and throwing them in the air with uninhibited laughter. Imagine this into reality for them in your mind. Imagine this person laying down in green pastures next to still waters. Pray that your bright imagination of God's full love for them be evident and true for them today. Amen.

Spiritual Exercise of the Week

Into Your Hands – Sit in a comfortable position and let your hands come into a gentle cradle on your lap. As if you were going to scoop up some water from a spring. Ponder upon your hands slowly and carefully. *What are they carrying these days? How does it feel to carry these things? How are your hands? How is your heart? How is your spirit?* Bring your hands up a bit closer to your face, as if you're washing your face. Look upon your hands tenderly and with compassion for all that you carry. *This is what has been given to you for now. Carry on.* Now, lift your hand up to the sky as you raise your gaze. Open your hand up and your arms open wide, like Jesus' hands and arms on the cross. Look up and say, *"Into your Hands, I commit my spirit."* Say it a few times. Rinse and repeat as needed. :)

Friday, April 10

Romans 8:31-39 (NRSV)

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all day long;

we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Points of Interest

- Paul's conviction and affirmation of God's love for us is a daring proclamation that I needed to hear today. One theologian called it, "certainty of Christian hope"¹. I imagine Paul, the writer of this book, to be an interesting man--a charismatic leader, skilled speaker and a writer, a well traveled man of confidence and probably with a touch of quirkiness about him. Let's just say, I wouldn't want to get in a debate with him. That's just my perception, my reconstruction of who I imagine Paul to be like. His words are filled with passion, and seem even a bit dramatic, "famine, nakedness, or peril or sword!" It's what I love, the way he puts it, like a grand gesture of love speech over the in-flight speakers in a rom-com, Paul proclaims on the top of his lungs, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!" And his confidence compels me to remember the love of God for me.
- What has come between you and God? Sin? Hardships? State of the world? Politics? Injustice? Imminent danger? Insecurity of the unknown future? Global threat? Enemies? Paul names them all. Bring any rhetorical question to Paul and he's got an answer for you. Nothing. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.
- Verse 36 is a quote from Psalm 44:22 where it says, "Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." Which was a line out of lament and anger that follows in the next verses, 23-24 with, "Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. 24 Why do you hide your face and forget our

¹ Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary: Romans*

misery and oppression?” Here the psalmist is accusing God of sleeping while we are facing death. Paul takes even such prayers of doubt and includes it into his line of reasoning for how and why God loves us. By the use of many rhetorical questions in his speech, you can tell that Paul was in fact debating or making a convincing argument to some stance. It’s as if he’s using their best reasoning for how God has given up on us, and turning it around. Even there, even in the face of death, he calls us conquerors because of God’s love for us.

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for those who face death, fear death, or are connected to someone who’s near death. Pray that there, God’s love will be extravagantly evident and real. Pray for encouragement, strength, and confidence in God’s nearness to them. That God is for them and with them.

Spiritual Exercise of the Week

Into Your Hands – Sit in a comfortable position and let your hands come into a gentle cradle on your lap. As if you were going to scoop up some water from a spring. Ponder upon your hands slowly and carefully. *What are they carrying these days? How does it feel to carry these things? How are your hands? How is your heart? How is your spirit?* Bring your hands up a bit closer to your face, as if you’re washing your face. Look upon your hands tenderly and with compassion for all that you carry. *This is what has been given to you for now. Carry on.* Now, lift your hand up to the sky as you raise your gaze. Open your hand up and your arms open wide, like Jesus’ hands and arms on the cross. Look up and say, *“Into your Hands, I commit my spirit.”* Say it a few times. Rinse and repeat as needed. :)