

“A Hidden Meaning”

(Easter Eggs #4)

Psalm 31: 1- 5 (NIV)

- ¹ In you, Lord, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame;
deliver me in your righteousness.
- ² Turn your ear to me,
come quickly to my rescue;
be my rock of refuge,
a strong fortress to save me.
- ³ Since you are my rock and my fortress,
for the sake of your name lead and guide me.
- ⁴ Keep me free from the trap that is set for me,
for you are my refuge.
- ⁵ Into your hands I commit my spirit;
deliver me, Lord, my faithful God.



Luke 23: 44- 46 (NIV)

- ⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.
- ⁴⁷ The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.”
- ⁴⁸ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. ⁴⁹ But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Reflection on the Word:

1. Why is David writing this psalm?
2. Is David questioning or is he affirming God care?
3. Is Jesus quoting Psalm 31 from the cross?
4. Why does the centurion declare Jesus’ righteousness? Why is this important?
5. Why do the people leave beating their breasts?
6. Why are the disciples watching these things?

Family Time or Small Group (Better Together) Discussion:

1. Who do you turn to in times of trouble and why do you turn to them?
2. Has God been a rock for you or a refuge? Ever been both?
3. What did Jesus do for you on the cross when he said “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”?
4. How can I pray for you?

The Sermon:

One of the truly amazing feats or accomplishments of Christianity is the fact that the cross was truly transformed. Think about it. Think about the number of crosses that you saw on your way to church this morning. The number of crosses you see before you now as you ... whether you are watching online or in person. Crosses that are front and center. Not hidden at all and in plain and full site.

And I think we forget how truly remarkable this really is!

If someone wasn't sure about whether Christianity is real ... well, have them look to the cross. How did the cross transform from an instrument of punishment and death to a symbol of hope ... a sign that is found on steeples, worn on stoles and liturgical clothing, jewelry dangling from ears and sometimes bling around the neck ... a cross that we keep in our pocket or billfold ... a cross that we hold in prayer.

How is it that when we see the cross ... or three crosses on the side of a highway that we think not of the torture of the cross, the suffering of the those crucified, the power and the intimidation of those who used the cross on others ...

How is it that when we see a cross ... we see Jesus as triumphant. We see Jesus as the victor. And we lose all fear of the cross and what that cross stood for in the Greco- Roman world of the first century.

You should know that the Romans did not invent crucifixion. Crucifixion was "invented" by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. It was a method of torture used by Alexander the Great who brought it to the eastern Mediterranean in the 4th Century BC. Another 100 years passed, and Phoenicians introduced it to Rome and they perfected this instrument of terror and death.

The Romans were at first appalled at the cruelty of crucifixion. The Roman Senate passed laws that crucifixion should rarely be used on Roman citizens, but it was the preferred method of punishment to be used on slaves, foreigners, and disgraced soldiers.

Soldiers, such as the centurion in our Lukan passage, were under strict orders to watch the crucifixion and to report back that the crucified were indeed dead. No rescue was tolerated and so soldiers often had to wait at the foot of the cross for time periods ranging from 6 hours to four days. Soldiers often took things into their own hands. They would light fires near the cross to asphyxiate or break the legs of the crucified to suffocate the victim and thus speed up the time of death so that they could go home. (see <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14750495/>)

Home ... only after the centurion would make the announcement that the guilty had received their just punishment. The centurion would say something like "Hail Caesar and his Procurator of Justice, Pontius Pilate ... the king of the Jews is dead." He would then go back and record the death.

But did you hear what happened instead?

The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God, and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."

No "hail Caesar or his procurator". No announcement of death.

Praise ... praising of God and an announcement of innocence and even more ... righteousness.

Why? What did the centurion see ... something that was hidden and now revealed? And how did the words of Jesus' commitment of his spirit into the Father's hands open the centurion's heart? The gospel of Luke gives us a significant clue with what came after the centurion's proclamation.

Luke tells us two things. One, the people went away beating their breasts. This was the Hebrew practice of repentance. With the right hand, one would beat the left breast so as to "take it to heart." As the centurion proclaims Jesus' righteousness at the cross, the people who were there ... perhaps even the very ones who shouted and taunted Jesus while he was on the cross ... now leave in repentance because of the words of the centurion. And two, those who followed Jesus, including the women, stood there and just watched these things.

What were they watching? Seeing? That at the cross, a Roman centurion is declaring Jesus' innocence and righteousness. The people who mocked, shouted, and cried out for Jesus' crucifixion are walking away in repentance. Could it be? Could it be as Jesus had said to them ... that he was God's Son? That his suffering and death ... death on the cross ... would be the transformational pivot that we all need? A transformational pivot that can only happen when one commits their spirit and places their spirit into the hands of the Lord.

Is that what they saw?

Is that what we need to see?

Is it what the world needs to see ... perhaps see again from a people who understand and believe in the miracle of the cross!

That we have faith to put our spirit ... which means our whole being into the hands of the Lord. Trusting God in every way. Believing with all that we have that God is our refuge and strength. God is quick to our rescue. A tower of strength. A mighty fortress. An ever-present help in troubled times. And God will deliver us in righteousness.

And while David penned words like these while hiding in a cave, trying to avoid the pursuit and capture of Saul ... *"Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God"* Jesus says these words out in the open ... nailed to the cross ... and confident that death will be defeated. Sin will be wiped clean and remembered no more. Grace will triumph. And so, he says with a loud voice: ***"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."***

The cross ... a sign of death, a symbol of the might of the powerful over the powerless, a sign and symbol of fear ... yet on a Good Friday ... a hidden meaning was revealed ...

The cross is both the sign and the symbol of those who commit their spirits to the Father.

It is a sign of trust.

It is a symbol of devotion.

It is the Easter Egg that opens us to be the transformational people of God that are needed so that this world will not only know about Jesus ... they will believe in him and see the hope ... the grace ... and the love ... revealed in the cross. Amen.

Thought for the Week Ahead:

“Prayer does not demand that we interrupt our work,
but that we continue working as if it were a prayer.”
— St. Mother Teresa