

During this Lenten season, we've been exploring Jesus' last seven words. Our last word in this series, the very last words Jesus spoke according to Luke, were actually not Jesus's words at all. He didn't compose these words as he drew his last breath. He isn't the first to speak these words nor the last. These words come from the thirty-first Psalm, which is a prayer from the people. Please join with me as we pray this prayer together:

"In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God" (Psalm 31:1-5).

What a fitting prayer for Jesus to pray as he endures the pain and suffering on the cross. His opposition tries to humiliate him. They set hidden traps for him. With each shameful act of stripping, whipping, and nailing, Jesus stays true to God. Even as darkness surrounds him, he holds on to God as his rock and fortress. He knows only God can rescue him. And so, even when it is the hardest thing he has ever had to do, even when he is tired and ready for it to be finished, he commends his Spirit to God. He commits his life; he hands over his life to God.

Jesus died with a prayer and with scripture on his lips. He didn't whisper them. He didn't hesitate or stutter. With his persecutors surrounding him, he declares boldly, proudly, with a loud voice, "I belong to God!" Do with me what you will, but I am not a part of this. I am with God. I commit my life to God.

With that, he is also saying to his persecutors, "I don't belong to the powers and darkness surrounding me! I don't belong to this violence! I don't belong to this fear! I don't belong to this pain and humiliation and shame. It is finished. It is done. I belong to God! The Father and I are one!"

As he utters these words and breathed his last breath, he is reunited with the Father. His Spirit returns to God. He foretold this to his disciples during the Last Supper when he said, "I came from the Father and have come into this world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father" (John 13:28). He shows us the way back to God, and he never sidesteps. All the way to the end, he is drawing nearer, closer to God until complete reunion. This same complete union with God awaits us.

If we look at Jesus' life and throughout the Bible, there's a pattern in coming to God: Taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. We see it at the Last Supper. Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to his disciples. But, we see it long before this. Jesus was taken from Mary's womb, blessed with the ability to teach, heal, and perform miracles, was broken on the cross for the sins of the world, and he was given as our Savior. He ultimately gives himself back to God.

We see this pattern in many of the Bible stories. God took Abraham out of his land and blessed him with Isaac. Abraham was broken when he was asked to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, and because of his willingness, he was given many generations.

God took Joseph out of the pit where his brothers left him. He was blessed to serve in charge of a household. He was broken by being falsely accused and sent to prison. He was then given a prominent position in Egypt where he could save many people.

Moses was taken out of the basket stuck in the river reeds. He was blessed by being raised in Pharaoh's house. He was broken by the many years in the wilderness. He was given to the Israelites as their founding leader.

Mary Magdalene was taken from her lowly position. She was blessed with the financial means of expensive perfume that she used to glorify Jesus. She was broken when she witnessed the crucifixion and discovered the empty tomb. She was given the great task of telling others that Jesus had been resurrected.

We even see it as we celebrate Palm Sunday. God took Jesus into Jerusalem. He was blessed by the praise of cheering and waving palm branches. He was broken by the crowd who turned on him all too quickly, yet he still gave his life for all of them.

We all follow this pattern throughout our lives as we come to Christ. We are taken; we are blessed; we are broken; we are given. And, the purpose of this pattern is to bring us back to God, all along the way, at every step. Jesus shows us the way. As he enters the world, as he enters Jerusalem, as he enters the darkness on the cross, he is always committing himself to God. He is always seeking to return to the Father.

It's one thing to commit ourselves to God when life is going well, when people are cheering and singing our praises. It's easy to stay committed when we realize we are being taken from the pit or out of our darkness. We continue our commitment when we receive blessing after blessing.

But, when things get real, when life gets hard, when we are taken into places we don't want to go, when we are broken, over and over, and we cry out, "How much longer, God?" That's when we often lose our way. As we see in the prayer from Psalm 31, we hold on to God as our rock

and fortress throughout our brokenness. God is with us, to cling to, when the darkness surrounds us. When we are at the end of our rope, God is waiting on just the other side to welcome us home, back to him. It is then, we are given eternal life, a life filled with endless love and grace.

Where are you in this pattern? Taken, blessed, broken, given. We may repeat it several times in each season of our lives as we make our way back to the Father. Wherever you find yourself this morning, commit your life to God. At every step, commend your Spirit into God's hands.

Holy God, we give ourselves to you. We place our lives into your hands. We trust that you will take us out of our darkness and into the life you have created for us. We thank you for the many blessings you pour into our lives. We cling to you when life turns dark and bitter, when life breaks us open for your grace. We give you our trust, our faith, our lives, so that you may give us back to the world as renewed and redeemed, so that you give us back to our families to lead in love, so that we give Christ's light to a darkened world. As we seek to draw closer to you at every step, Gracious God, we commit our lives to you. Amen.