"Into Your Hands…..”
Gary ArnTessoni
Luke 23: 44-49

This week I looked at some different tag line advertisements – slogans that are used to try to make the point and get people to buy a certain product. I’ll share a few this morning.

- When you care enough to send the very best……. - Hallmark.
- Think small……. – Volkswagen
- Got milk……. – Milk
- Save money, live better……. – Walmart
- Melts in your mouth; not in your hands……. – M&Ms
- Finger licking good……. – Kentucky Fried Chicken
- Just Do It……. – Nike
- Fifteen minutes could save you 15% or more……. - Geico
- Don’t leave home without it……. – American Express

There was a study done in 2000 by Northwestern University’s graduate department of integrated marketing. They found that there was one tag line that has become the most recognizable in America with the longest surviving actual paid campaign: You’re in good hands with Allstate.

Allstate’s advertisements span across television, print, radio, outdoors, and through the internet branded with this tag line, “Are you in good hands,” or You’re in good hands,” or they even became known as the “Good Hands People.”

It is interesting to note that the way they got this whole idea was from Dale Ellis who was one of the Company’s sales executives. Ellis’ daughter had been very sick in the hospital, and he and his wife were seriously worried about her. When a nurse saw them, she walked over to them and said, “Don’t worry, you’re in good hands with this doctor.” Later that year when Ellis had pulled together a brainstorming group to talk about what the first national slogan for the company might be, he remembered that event and this whole idea about being in good hands with Allstate was born.

We resonate with this motto because we desire in our lives to be in good hands. It’s interesting to note that it’s the prayer that Jesus prays here as we continue our series on the last words of Jesus. He prays, “Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit.”

Being in God’s hands meant that Jesus turned His life and His will over to God. It’s really a paraphrase or a translation out of Psalm 31, verse 5. It was a prayer that every Jewish mother taught their child to say every night before going to sleep. It was like us
being taught to say, “Now I lay me down to sleep…” At the end of the day before the darkness crept in, a Jewish mother would teach her child to say, “Into Your hands I commend my spirit.” The reason Jesus could pray this prayer from the cross was because He had learned to pray this prayer everyday as He placed His life continually into the hands of God.

Jesus’ life was a constant connection with God; a continuing conversation that was always underway. It was because Jesus could pray this prayer in calmness that He was also able to pray it in crises. This prayer defined His life; His actions; His mission and all that would happen to Him afterwards.

Through this prayer, Jesus realized who He was. He realized who He belonged to. He understood His mission and it helped Him to continue to reframe that.

If we practice this prayer, then we also will know who we are; we will realize who we belong to and God will continually bring us back to center where we need to be.

What is it that defines our lives; our actions; our mission; our eternity? Put another way, do we know who we are? And who we belong to? And how do we live that out?

Today on Palm Sunday we start Holy Week. This week is filled with ups and downs for Jesus; its full of cheering and booing; its full of highs and lows; shouts of “Crown Him” on one side followed by shouts of “Crucify Him” on the other.

It’s the slow progression that He now takes to the cross. It’s a series of letting go; of commending things; of handing them off to His disciples and others.

So far in this series we have heard phrases like, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” We heard Him utter to one of the thieves on the cross, “Today you will be with Me in paradise.” We saw Him commit the care of His mother, Mary, to one of His disciples, John. We heard Him utter these words of defeat, “My God, my God why have You forsaken Me?” We heard the humanness of Jesus in the words “I thirst.” And now Jesus ends His life with a prayer, “Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit.”

This cross in Jesus’ life all boils down to this one event. Everything had led to it. He had done everything to prepare for it. Now it was time for Him to leave the world.

If we learn how to pray this prayer, “Into your hands I commend my spirit,” we learn how to hold on to life with a looser grip; but we also learn how to hold on to God with all of our might.

There is one thing different with what Jesus says on the cross and Psalm 31, verse 5. It is just one word. On the cross Jesus starts the prayer with the word “Father.” It’s a term of endearment; an intimate term. He knows who it is He is placing His life into – the hands that are waiting for Him. He knows who it is that He is entrusting Himself to. It’s a homecoming for Him. It’s the end of His mission. He’s finished everything that He
has come to do and as strange as it sounds and as hard as it is to understand, His death brings a movement that will impact and change ALL of life as it has been known up to that moment.

Jesus’ death has met its match. The grave will lose its power. People will be made new. The new creation is on the brink of exploding and breaking out all over the place.

Jesus prays this prayer of trust. It says to us that when nothing else is working in our lives, God is. We can trust our lives to God’s care and concern. Saying, “into Your hands I commend my spirit” is another way of saying I belong to You; I trust in You; I’ve entrusted myself to You.

What do you need today that you could hand over to God?

Some of us have been studying the second book in the series, *The Good and Beautiful Life*. A couple of weeks ago we did a lesson on learning to live without worry. Life can be filled with worry. All kinds of things we worry about. Have you every worried about worrying too much? If you do, that tells you something.

This week I was really worried about email not working – worried about who was trying to get me that I don’t know about. I decided to go to the internet and look at what the 10 most common things were that people worry about. I googled it and lots of links popped up. I went to the first one and looked at the 10 items and sure enough they were things that I worry about. I noticed the next link said “20 things” people worry about. I went to that one and sure enough they were also things I worry about. The next link said “30 things” and the next said “40 things.” I realized there is a pattern here. It’s starting to emerge: the more we worry, the more worry comes our way.

We do worry about things. We worry about the economy, money, health, relationships, terrorism, jobs, careers. We wonder and worry about what comes after death.

On the front of the bulletin this week there is a quote by Corrie Ten Boom who is one of the German Holocaust survivors. She says, “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow.” She is saying that it doesn’t prevent us from having things happen; but she says, “Worry does empty today of its strength.”

Prayer is an anecdote to worry. Jesus says in Matthew, “Who of you by worrying can add a single day to your life.” He is really saying that worry doesn’t help you much. What He does say is that instead of worrying lean heavier into praying.

There is a great passage in Philippians 4. Probably most of us have heard it before. Paul writes about this whole idea of anxiety and worry and he says instead of being anxious, pray. He starts the verses (Chapter 4, verse 4), “The Lord is near. Don’t worry about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”
Worry is a kind of negative meditation that makes us focus on a problem; and as we do, it gets bigger and bigger. Experts say that probably 98% of the stuff we worry about never really happens, so it really is a waste of energy and a waste of focus.

Prayer has the ability to change our focus. It lifts our eyes up instead of focusing on the problems that are around us. It helps us to look at God. When we focus on God, the focus of the problem diminishes, and we stop to see it as the most powerful thing and we begin to recognize God as more powerful instead.

Prayer places our focus on God.

It was about a month ago at Westminster that a group of members had the opportunity to attend a lecture at West Chester University. They were hosting Immaculée Ilibagiza. Immaculée is a survivor of the Rwanda Genocide. You may have heard of her book, *Left To Tell*. The subtitle for the book is *Discovering God amidst the Rwandan Holocaust*. Immaculée was a part of the Tutsi Tribe. If you remember back to the Rwanda Genocide, the Hutu tribe had gone after all the Tutsis. There was a lot happening – a lot of brutality; a lot of killing. At one point when Immaculée was at home, her father told her that he wanted her to go to this pastor he knew and ask if he would hide her so she wouldn't get hurt with everything that was happening.

She went to this pastor; a member of the Hutu tribe, and he took her and seven other women and he hid them in a small bathroom in his house so the Hutus wouldn't find them. They were in a bathroom that was 3 feet x 4 feet. For 91 days they hid in the bathroom scared to death for their lives, worrying all the time. It was in that bathroom that Immaculée began to start praying.

As she started to pray, she started to change in the way that she looked at things. She said that one time while sitting down in deep silence (that's all they could do in this bathroom with kids piled up on their laps), she discovered the greatest joy of her life. She discovered God there. She discovered that God was inside her; that God was bigger than any pain. But she also realized this. Listen to what she said. “I realized that being spared is much different than being saved.” She realized that she could be spared and live through the Holocaust; but to be saved would require more. When she finally left the bathroom, she found that her house had been destroyed; most of her family had been killed; but she also realized that she had met God. There was an anger and resentment that were eating her alive; they were destroying her faith. But instead of succumbing to the rage she felt; she continued time after time to turn to God in prayer.

She prayed asking for God’s guidance. “What do I do now? How do I go on? What do I do with the hate that I feel?” She said that God worked in her to bring her to a whole new place in life. She said that this deep understanding began to settle into her as God changed her. That she came to have a total belief in God; that she learned what it meant to forgive. She learned what it meant to be a better lover herself – to love people more. She learned what it meant to be in somebody else’s skin.
When we saw her at West Chester University, she’d been on a speaking tour, going across the nation, talking about how it is that God can change us. God can turn our hate into love. God can rebuild our lives. God can lead us through the worst of things that this world has but by God’s power and grace, we can come out the other end of that entirely new people. Prayer had changed her as Jesus walked with her through the aftermath of all that.

It was a great day! We enjoyed meeting Immaculée and listening to her. One of the things most humbling to me was that there were 200 Catholic high school girls that came in buses and covered most of the auditorium at West Chester University. She said to them very pointedly, “Don’t let someone else’s hate turn you into a bully. Instead, pray; and God will help you.”

Pray and God will help you.

It was an amazing story. The most amazing thing to me was that Imaculee would say that it wasn’t that she was so amazing, but that God is always amazing.

Jesus knew that prayer was an essential part of our relationship with God. It’s the one thing that can put us before God in ways that can redirect us; that can help us to think and live healthier lives. He came as a suffering servant because he knew that’s where the real power existed. It was that power that would break the pattern of death and bring life to the whole world. So this week as we enter Holy Week, I think this is a good prayer for us, “Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit.”

Remember as we walk through this week that we are going to see the worst the world has to offer but we are going to see it met by the best that God has to offer and the power of death is broken forever.

It’s a prayer whereby we can place our lives in the hands of God everyday remembering that when we do that in the calmness that we also find it natural to do in the midst of the crisis.

Amen.