

“Into Your Hands I Commend My Spirit”

*A meditation offered by the Rev. F. M. “Buddy” Stallings, Priest-in-Charge,
at The Three Hours service, April 6, 2012.*

Good Friday.

Based on Luke 23: 44-49.

Dying is quite common. It happens all the time. In fact, those who know such things tell us that in one 24-hour cycle on this globe, 150 thousand people die. Death is indeed common and is, beyond a doubt, the inevitable conclusion to which each of us is at this very moment moving closer and closer.

And, yet, the denial of its certainty lies deep within us. Almost 40 years ago—it is hard to believe it has been that long—in his classic work, *The Denial of Death*, Earnest Becker rocked the world with his claim that our lives are quite deliberately organized around the denial of our mortality; our activities to deny it, he claimed, are at best distractions, substitutes for real life. We only begin to accept death, thereby coming truly to live, Becker purported, when we embark upon an “immortality project,” a life devotion to something that we believe will last forever, an outcome that long outlives us. There, he claimed, will we find our meaning and purpose for being. Non-specific angst and despair abound in lives that have no genuine sense of that which is eternal, whereas peace, even in the midst of great turmoil, can be known when that which truly matters is the context of our lives.

Jesus came to the hour of his death as one who clearly had known and embraced his “immortality project,” as one who indeed had brought light and life to the world in ways that would forever live, ways that would find rebirth again and again in the lives and stories of people like us, ways that are transformative and eternal.

And though his death was brutal in ways beyond our capacity to imagine, he died at peace, teaching even in the last words attributed to him the manner in which a centered life is able to die. Drawing from the scripture, which he treasured and from which he gained his footing and strength, he uttered these great words of passage from Psalm 31: *“Into your hands I commend my spirit.”* “My work, my time, my life here is done; and I leave it in your hands, Father, Abba. I go in peace for that for which I was created has been accomplished.”

What leads to the capacity to say these words at our own deaths and, more importantly, to utter them every day of our lives as a mantra at the end of our waking moments, is to be fully alive now. In some ways the principal focus of Richard Rohr’s

wonderful book last year, *Falling Upward*, is his claim that “death is largely a threat to those who have not yet lived.” Only one who has lived well, not perfectly, not idealized in someone else’s view of his or her life—not that for sure, perhaps particularly not that—but lived well, integrated and actualized as his/her true self, can with clarity and comfort say, “*Into your hands I commend my spirit.*”

It is extraordinary that even at this hour, the pinnacle of the history of salvation—certainly as we have been taught to think of it—the moment of Jesus’ death, Jesus teaches us how to live. Jesus came to transform lives, to set our selves, our true selves, back on course, to show us the ways to live and to love one another. Only when we come to the end of a life, knowing that we have lived as truthfully and lovingly as we could, can we walk into the great unknown beyond with the assurance of these words.

The message even from the cross is that time is short. To what are we giving our lives? What constitutes our immortality projects? Are we living purposefully in ways that will linger long after we are gone? Do we love as widely and well as we might? Do we concentrate our lives on things that matter?

What must we do so that we, like Jesus, may say with assurance, “*Into your hands I commend my spirit.*”