

Clouds gathered. The sky grew dark. An ill wind stirred the trees with news of stormy weather. But the fish were biting! A boulder leftover from some ice age glacier's advance had created the perfect perch for this amateur fisherman. Below me, a spring-fed stream widened into a pool that was deep and wide; within the pool were a variety of native fish, which were the only living things showing less sense than me. I baited a hook; cast it out, and when the hook hit the water, a fish hit the hook. I was catching and releasing as fast as I could, but as fast as I released, the same fish got caught.

I saw the storm coming. But I didn't want to stop. It was my best day of fishing ever! So I pushed past the limits of common sense until a bolt of lightning made me see the light. I ran in the rain back to my cabin as lightning lashed the ridges around me. As I ran, I thought of what a fool I'd been and that if lightning should strike me, it would be a pretty dumb way to die.

Jesus was dying a fool's death. That's what the crowd thought. That's what the soldiers thought. That's what the religious authorities thought: He said so much about saving others. Let's see if he can save himself! What a fool to die this way!

Clouds gathered. The sky grew dark. An ill wind disturbed the peace with news of stormy weather, but God's Own Fool was not deterred. His total trust triumphed over turbulent times. *Luke 23:46 (NRSV) Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.*

On this Palm Sunday as we remember what Jesus suffered and why, we're going to consider what God might be inviting us to do when clouds gather over us, our skies grow dark, and an ill wind disturbs our peace.

### Clouds Gather

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Those "dumb" fish probably knew something that a certain foolish fisherman did not; they knew a storm was coming. They knew that they had a limited opportunity to feed before they would have to seek shelter; they knew that today's meal would have to last for a while.

Fish and fisherman were making the same mistake – we were letting our circumstances determine our decisions. We weren't making choices; we were letting the wind take us where it will.

That is a recipe for ruin; a recipe Jesus does not follow. He is about to die, and He will die on His own terms. He will die as He lived. He will die in faith. *"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."*

Our lesson from Luke gives us a wide-angle view of the final moments of Jesus' life. The skies above us darken and the curtain of the temple is torn in two. There were two curtains in the temple; a curtain that separated the court of the Gentiles from the court for the Jews, and a curtain that separated the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum in which it was believed God's presence dwelled on the Mercy Seat, from the people. Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and only on the Day of Atonement. When he went in, he had to take blood as a sacrifice for his sins and for the unintended sins of the people.

Luke shows us the barriers that separate us from God being demolished. We see the power of evil, the power of darkness, confronted and overcome. We see the penalty for sin fully and finally paid once and for all. We see our salvation, and the reason why our tradition teaches, "We must hope well of all." The Roman centurion had it right, *Luke 23:47 (NRSV) When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent."* The Greek word for "innocent" is commonly translated as "righteous," which is to say, "right with God."

Jesus died keeping the faith; His death invites us to live keeping the faith. Not faith in ourselves; this is where our questions about "who will be saved" go astray. These questions assume that our salvation is in our hands; we go to heaven (or don't) depending upon the choices we make. We put ourselves in the place of the high priest, who can only enter the Holy of Holies with blood to atone for ourselves and our people. Have we done enough? Is there something we've missed? What about those we know and love who don't give God the time of day?

Our salvation isn't in our hands; our salvation is in God's hands, and God has good hands. Join the centurion. Look to the cross. See what has taken place. Jesus died keeping the faith; He died keeping the faith for us that we cannot keep for ourselves. Clouds gathered. Curtains ripped. And Jesus kept the faith through it all, *Luke 23:46 (NRSV) "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."*

Clouds will gather. Trials will come that threaten to tear you apart. Keep the faith, when you don't see and you don't understand. Keep the faith! Today, and every day, offer yourself to God. Your salvation is out of your hands, but nothing can take you out of God's hands! Cry out from the cross you bear, *Luke 23:46 (NRSV) "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."* And know for certain, today and every day, that by God's grace through Jesus Christ, you will be saved.

### Serenity in the Storm

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What happens to us after we die is important, and the cross offers us hope. What happens to us before we die is also important, and the cross offers us hope; salvation is more than consolation in our sorrow; salvation is serenity in the storm.

The storm surrounds Jesus; the cross is its epicenter. The cosmic conflict between good and evil, between creation and chaos, between the love of God and all of the hate of history, is focused on Calvary.

Jesus is crucified. His body is failing, but His spirit is unbowed and unbroken. He has serenity in the storm. *Luke 23:46 (NRSV) "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."*

Oswald Chambers wrote in his classic devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*, "Faith is not intelligent understanding, faith is deliberate commitment to a Person where I see no way."<sup>1</sup>

*Luke 23:46 (NRSV) "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."*

Storms surround us. We see no way. We see the darkness. We see circumstances

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<sup>1</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*. Ulrichsville, OH: Barbour and Company, Inc. 1991. 61.

that are beyond our control: The job we thought was ours goes away. The good health we nurtured is broken by cancer and disease. The life we knew; the life we loved is no more.

We're in the storm. We're caught up in the battle between good and evil, between creation and chaos, between the love of God and the hate of history. And we can do our part; we can strike our blow for good, for creation, for love; we can be "thy kingdom come, thy will be done."

We can do what Jesus did. We can pray. We can believe. We can commit ourselves and our circumstances to God. *Luke 23:46 (NRSV) "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."*

Does this solve our problem? Does this provide instant answers? No, faith gives us something more. Faith gives us serenity in the storm; serenity in this storm; serenity in the storms that will come. Faith gives us the confidence that come what may we can find a way, because we are walking by faith, not by sight, not by circumstances; we put ourselves today and every day in the hands of God, the Creator who conquered chaos on Calvary; the Holy One who overcame evil on the cross; the God Whose love was hated and still chooses to love.

Clouds will gather. Storms will surround you. Trials will come that threaten to tear you apart. Keep the faith, when you don't see and you don't understand. Keep the faith! Discover serenity in the storm as you commit yourself today and every day to the One who prayed and showed us the way, *Luke 23:46 (NRSV) "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."* Amen.