And so today, on this day we call Good Friday, we come together to commemorate the death of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The truth that humbles all who consider it, is that it is his death that makes him our Savior in the first place. Without the events of Good Friday, Jesus would not be our Savior. Without the events of Good Friday, our sin would not be atoned. Without the events of Good Friday, we would have no basis on which to call this day “Good.”

Scripture tells us that for the last three hours during which Jesus hung on the cross, there was darkness in the land. The darkness was indicative of the upper hand that evil enjoyed through the suffering of the Lamb of God on the cross. The darkness was indicative of the oppressive gravity of the sins of the world being placed on the shoulders of this man Jesus. But the darkness ceased at his death, because at his death his work had been accomplished. The darkness ceased, and the temple curtain was torn in two, because the sin that separates us from God had been dealt with according to God’s righteousness and love. Upon the death of Jesus, the way to God has been made clear once again.

Just before Jesus breathed his last, he surrendered himself into the hands of the One who had sent him: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” When all things are considered, there is no other way Jesus could have ended it. It had to happen this way. It had to be this way, for at least three reasons.

The first reason it had to end this way is that the only thing that remains to be done is for Jesus to die. In the sequence of the events of the day, we go to John’s gospel to know that just before Jesus uttered his last words, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,” he cried out the words of confident assurance that he had done what he had been sent to do, “It is finished.” He has taken all the sins of the world upon himself. There is nothing more that can be added to what he has taken upon himself for our sake, except to pay the ultimate penalty for us, and that is death. As he has reached that moment, he can now give himself in peace to the One who sent him for this purpose: Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

The second reason it had to end this way is that it is the fulfillment of Scripture. Up to this point, every saying of Jesus from the cross in some way or another fulfills
Scripture. Everything Jesus says from the cross is not random, but purposeful, for Scripture had always pointed to this day.

When Jesus said, “Father, forgive them…,” he was fulfilling the prophecy of the Suffering Servant in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah where it says he “made intercession for the transgressors.”1 When he said to the thief on the cross next to him, “Today you shall be with me in paradise,” he was fulfilling the promise of the angel who spoke before the birth of Jesus saying, “…you are to name [this baby] Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”2 When he told his mother Mary, “Woman, behold your son,…” Jesus was mindful of that moment in his infancy when Simeon had told Mary that “a sword will pierce your own soul too.”3 When Jesus cried out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, he was quoting the words of the 22nd psalm; even more, he was experiencing the curse of God’s abandonment in his own person. When Jesus said, “I thirst,” he was fulfilling another psalm which says, “…for my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.”4 When Jesus boldly proclaims, “It is finished,” once again he was fulfilling the prediction with which the 22nd psalm comes to a close, that he will be worshiped and posterity will serve him, “saying that he has DONE it,” that he has FINISHED it.5

And now, in saying, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,” he is once again quoting from the Psalms, specifically the 31st psalm, fulfilling the words of faithful trust in the midst of trial and tribulation.6 He is fulfilling the spirit of the psalm that declares that we can turn ourselves over to God because in God’s hands we will rest securely, that our faith will not be denied, that God will prevail over the struggles which assail us.

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. When Jesus said this, he was fulfilling the Scripture. It had to be this way.

But I think there is a third reason that it had to end this way, that there could be no other way that it would end. Even if Jesus didn’t have to die in order to pay the penalty for our sins, even if Jesus wasn’t constrained by the fulfillment of Scripture, still he would’ve come to this point in which the last thing he said before uttering his last breath would be “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” You see, for Jesus it was the most natural thing he could possibly do, to put himself into the hands of his Father. It was the only way he knew to be.

All his life, Jesus lived in communion with his Father in heaven. Until that brief moment on the cross, never had there been a time when Jesus was not in communion with God. As a young lad, when his parents thought they had lost him only to find him in

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1 Isaiah 53:12
2 Matthew 1:21
3 Luke 2:35
4 Psalm 69:21
5 See Psalm 22:31
6 Psalm 31:5
the Temple, Jesus’ response to his parents was, “Did you know that I must be in my Father’s house?”⁷ Time and again in the gospels we see Jesus getting up early in the morning and going off by himself—only, he isn’t by himself, he’s spending a few quiet moments with his Father. Jesus stated emphatically to those who would listen, “I and the Father are one.”⁸ And before Jesus left his disciples, he prayed in their presence, “I ask not only on behalf of those who will believe in me through your word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us…”⁹

The truth is, it was the most natural thing in the world for Jesus to commend himself into the hands of his Father, for that is the way he had always lived his life. After the mocking and insults of the crowd, after the pain of watching his own mother witness his execution, even after the agony of abandonment by God—Jesus knew there was no better place to be than in the hands of his Father.

You see, the 22⁰th Psalm wasn’t the only one with which Jesus was intimately familiar. To be sure, on the cross he experienced the anguish of abandonment by God—My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? To be sure, on the cross he experienced the agony of his bones being torn out of joint, of his body being poured out like water. To be sure, on the cross he was humiliated by the mockery of the crowd—Commit your cause to the Lord, let him deliver you! To be sure, the words of the 22⁰th Psalm came alive as Jesus hung on the cross.

But don’t you think the words of the very next Psalm also took on new meaning to Jesus? Don’t you think he also remembered the promise of a God who would accompany him through the valley of the shadow of death? Don’t you think he also remembered a God who prepares a table for him in the presence of his enemies, and who promised that he could dwell in the house of the Lord forever?

Don’t you think he knew?

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. These are not words of sad resignation; they are words borne of faith and love and knowledge of God. They are words that acknowledge that in life and in death we belong to God. If we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.¹⁰

It was perfectly natural for Jesus to commend himself into the hands of the Father, because he knew who the Father is—One who is gracious and compassionate, full of steadfast love. In the end, after all is said and done, after all the pain and humiliation and suffering and anguish, Jesus knew the One into whose hands he was giving himself. He was giving himself to God.

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

In the end, that was enough. Amen.

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⁷ Luke 2:49
⁸ John 10:30
⁹ John 17:20-21
¹⁰ Romans 14:8