

March 28, 2010
Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion
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WE DIE THE WAY WE LIVE

Maybe you've heard it said that we die the way we live. One man who described his mother as a drama queen wasn't surprised at her behavior at the end—the gasping, flailing and crying out incessantly. People who tend to accept what life brings them often die with a calm serenity. Joseph Sittler, a well-known theologian, spent his last days with the same curiosity he always had. He wanted to hear the poems of Emily Dickinson. He wanted a harmonic explanation of exquisite passages in Bach's *Saint John Passion*.

You see it most clearly in Luke. Jesus dies the way he lives: for the sake of others. He heals the severed ear of the high priest's slave. He reaches out to the women of Jerusalem. He promises paradise to the repentant thief on the cross. And at the last hour of his life, he forgives the very ones who murder him.

Jesus empties himself, he relinquishes power for the sake others. As one writer said, “We don't mind a Buddha, Moses, or a Jesus we could take home as a friend or kindly mentor. But what about the one who would turn your world upside down by identifying with victims everywhere? In the cross we see a God who chooses to suffer violence rather than sponsor it.” (Alan Jones, *Reimagining Christianity*)

It's so much more than the simple phrase, “Jesus died for my sins.” As someone put it bluntly: “Jesus died because he was considered a threat to a society that neglected the poor and worshiped the sword.” (George S. Johnson)

Maybe we'd rather avoid this passion story. We have cried enough tears. Our hearts are hardened. Yet in all the stories and rituals of this most holy week, we will confront something baffling, yet life-giving: surrender.

In great anguish, Jesus struggles and finally says: not my will, but yours.

But maybe it's Jesus' last words in Luke's passion that can teach how to both die and live. With hands open. With surrender. “Into your hands I commend my spirit.”