

Into Your Hands, I Commend My Spirit

April 20, 2021 Scott Gunn

*Into your hands I commend my spirit, * for you have redeemed me, O LORD, O God of truth. —*
Psalm 31:5

As I read my way through the psalms, every now and then a verse leaps off the page. Sometimes it's because of a deep resonance, a connection with some other bit of scripture or liturgy. And sometimes those verses loom large because of a connection to something in my life.

Anyone who prays the office of compline regularly will recognize these lines. They are quoted in the service and then followed by lovely lines from Psalm 17, “*Keep us, O Lord, as the apple of your eye; * Hide us under the shadow of your wings.*” So as I cruise through Psalm 31, I can't help but remember many happy thoughts from compline prayers said with people near and far.

But the deeper connection for me comes from funerals over the years. Near the end of the service, we commend the dead to God's everlasting care:

Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant N. Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive him into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light. Amen.

I love the brutal honesty and complete hope of that commendation. We are all sinners. But we are also redeemed. That's actually the Gospel right there. We are redeemed by Jesus our Good Shepherd and Great High Priest.

We don't need to wait until the end of our earthly life. Commending ourselves to God isn't a bad way to live. Compline provides a lovely reminder, but we do well to commend ourselves to God's care every moment of every day.

What if we made it all about God instead of all about us? Facing a big decision, we might commend ourselves and our decision to God, making it about God's will rather than our preference. Facing struggles, we might commend ourselves to God, trusting that God can redeem our suffering and struggles. Facing joys, we might commend our future to God, asking for wisdom to move ahead in the joy that we have received, eager to share the joy of God's great love with a world in need.

Commending ourselves to God can be tremendously liberating. I think that's just what Jesus hoped for us. If we can pass on our burdens, our hopes, our sorrows, and our very lives, we will indeed find an easy yoke and a light burden.