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West Valley Presbyterian Church
Into Your Hands, I Commit My Spirit
The Power of the Cross
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OPENING PRAYER

Watch the video of the REUNION <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFsfmB64kss>

Why do reunions like this move us so deeply?
I know watching this, I was deeply moved...
When people love each other and are supposed to be together, and they can't be together, it gets to us doesn't it?
And then when it happens, we just fall apart...its so great!

And I truly believe that this moves us on a human level because this speaks to a deeper truth...that we all long for reunion with God our Father, from whom we've been separated

The reason I chose this particular You Tube video (cause theres many to choose from) is because at first the little girl looks just fine...right? She's jumping, she's running, she's giving teachers and others HI 5's You don't see the tears...the longing she carries inside her At first glance you aren't aware by her behavior that she is missing her Father - nothing in her behavior indicates that (except her mother telling us that she's been sad) But clearly... She's learned to cope ...she's playing in the field, she's jumping, she's smiling...but the longing is still there...and comes out when she recognizes her Dad

I would say that's the state of the human race...our longing for God is embedded, deeply inside of all of us
A longing for reunion, a longing for connection with our Creator
But we've lived so long without that connection, we've learned to COPE
We've learned to live...without God
And many have grown numb to that longing ...just like when you are starving after awhile you lose your appetite...your longing to eat - even though without food you will die...

But when Emma sees her father again...the tears come
She's reminded of what she truly wants, truly desires
What her heart has wanted all along...when she sees it...she recognizes
the one she has missed...
She is overwhelmed...she cries...she laughs...she embraces
That's the power of reunion
What happened here in this video – that's the way its supposed to be-we
get that when we watch it...

And that's what Jesus came to do – to reconcile us, bring us back
together with God our Father; so that what you just saw...in that video...
so THAT can happen between us and God...
Did you hear what she said at the end?
"I thought he'd never come, but then he did."
"I thought I'd never see him again...but then there he was."
Her hopes weren't disappointed, and neither are ours when it comes to
God, although sometimes we may feel abandoned.

How many Old Testament prophets and writers wrote that about God?
Where are you God?
Have you forgotten your people? Have you abandoned us?
We are forsaken...we are alone...we are without hope
In essence...we doubt you will ever come.

There are 400 years between the Old Testament and the New Testament
400 years when God is silent
Its almost like the separation between the human race and God is
intensified before the Messiah, Jesus comes
And I am sure for many Jews the question was, Would God ever come
back, and save his people? Would he be distant forever?

And then Jesus came. Unexpectedly, in a kind of disguise – born as a
child to peasant parents, and surprised us all. And
The greatest reunion, the greatest embrace, ever forged in the history of
the world was the REUNION between us and our Creator made possible
by the power of the cross
This is a powerful cross...because it forges the embrace of God with
humanity

In our more thoughtful moments we know that there is more to life than just the day to day existence

That we were made for more than just a fleeting lifespan of four score and ten where we entertain ourselves mindlessly and make a living

Actually we don't "make a living"

We are given the gift of living...we don't make our lives at all...life is a gift
And yet to what end...?

We want our lives to matter, to have purpose and meaning

Why? Animals don't care about this – they just live...

Why do humans seek meaning and purpose and deep relationships with others? Why do we want our lives to matter?

Because we belong to a God who created us for meaning and purpose that comes out of connection with him...

But we've gone along existing for such a long time without God that we've learned how to cope...

We become less than what we were meant to be; our longing for God has gone underground

We've learned to cope, and live, and exist here on earth in a framework of survival and making do...having fun, living as best we can and taking the good with the bad

But just as much as that child, when she saw her father, burst into tears of joy

That same longing is in each of us...to be reunited with our heavenly father whose longing for us is even more intense than our longing for him.

On that day when Jesus spoke his last words from the cross the first of these last words were 1. "IT IS FINISHED."

John's gospel is the only one that records the words "IT IS FINISHED" – and this statement is just one word **in Aramaic... "FINISHED!" or "COMPLETED!"**

Ever do that when you're writing a paper for a class...shouting out as you write the last reference to your Bibliography..."FINISHED!" – a triumphal shout, right?

"COMPLETED"

Or the taxes! You might declare with loud voice "DONE!"

"ACCOMPLISHED!"

It's victory...it's relief...it means what you finished what you set out to do...its been done
So we need to ask...when Jesus said "It is finished"...what did he mean?
What was actually accomplished on the cross?

Well what was accomplished on the cross is one of the most important doctrines of the Christian faith...it is called the doctrine of the **atonement**

And more happened on the cross than we can ever fully understand – there are treatises written on this and I invite you to read up on the different perspectives...which by the way we have in our church library

But just to simplify for our purposes this morning...look at the word "atonement" which when pulled apart spells "**at-one-ment**"
You see that's the reunion part...Jesus became sin for us so that we didn't have to be separated from God any longer...
So that we could experience a great reunion with our Creator and not have that big barrier of darkness and sin keeping us distant –Jesus came to fulfill the deep longing of every human heart...to be embraced by God

Being reunited with the One who loves us that much ought to bring us to tears

I believe that our separation from God is the deepest sorrow we hold within us

The greatest wound we carry; the hardest pain we bear

But we've become calloused to that longing and don't even know its there

But when that longing for God gets reawakened by the Holy Spirit in us

When the Holy Spirit touches us and reminds us who we belong to

Quickens us to recognize this...when that happens

People fall on their knees at this cross with tears...tears of joy

I think I shared with you at least one other time the story of the pastor who was working with a real cynic – a young guy who'd seen the rough edges of life

And the pastor was kind of at his wits end and he brought this kid into the sanctuary told him...look up there...what do you see

"I see a cross" said the kid, "but so what? Jesus Christ died for me..and I don't care...and don't give a "blanket-blank."

SAY THAT AGAIN, said the pastor...but look at the cross while your saying it
So the kid did. Looking up at the cross he said "Jesus Christ died for me...and I don't give a rip."
SAY IT AGAIN, said the pastor...keep looking at the cross and say it again. This time there was a pause. The kid wasn't so cockey...
By the fifth time...he couldn't say it anymore...he just stood there staring at the cross. And finally he choked out the words "Jesus Christ, died for me." And he fell on his knees and started weeping.

You see its there, deep within all of us, our longing for reunion, for forgiveness, for connection to God.
There's power in this cross to unite us to the One we've longed for all of our lives and never perhaps experienced
There's power in this cross to give us the embrace of a God who put that longing in us to begin with
There's power in this cross to communicate to us forgiveness, and intimacy with our Creator.

I love what Adam Hamilton writes about the meaning of the cross...

"The cross is a divine drama in which God through Jesus is revealing the darkness of the human soul and the relentless grace and love of God for the human race. It is a sculpture that when seen from one angle is so horrible and repulsive you can scarcely look at it, but when viewed from another angle is so beautiful you cannot help falling to your knees in utter amazement. It is a masterpiece in which the Artist has painted at one and the same time a self portrait revealing his character, and (at the same time) a portrait of you - your need for mercy and his willingness to offer it to you - it is a love story that moves you to tears and begs to be read again and again."

Second, the very very last thing Jesus said from the cross that day is **2."Into your your hands I commit my spirit."** This is very poignant because these words were actually a prayer that Jewish mothers taught their young children to say.
Often the children would pray this prayer before going to sleep at night
Some of us may have learned the prayer "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

Well this statement, *into your hands I commit my spirit*, was a prayer like that...especially for children

It is a prayer of surrender, of peace, and of utter trust

Let's say those last words of Jesus together: "***Into your hands I commit my spirit.***"

When it was finished, when the terrible ordeal of the cross was over

After feeling forsaken by God, and cast off by him as he cried "My God, My God...why have you forsaken me."

Jesus returns now, with childlike trust, ready to be embraced by his Abba, Father once again

Scripture says, "**Having loved his own, he loved them to the end.**"

Jesus finished well. He had completed what he came to do. He'd made our reunion with God possible.

Rejected, humiliated, beaten and cursed with our sin...our separation from God

Now it was the end...it was finished...and it was ALSO *a time of reunion for Jesus, back into his Fathers arms*

This last word of Christ on the cross... it's a statement of faith, because once again this child's prayer comes from a psalm...(My God..My God – came from a psalm too)...these last words of Christ...a prayer taught to young children...comes from psalm 31...

Let's read a few verses of this psalm...together...and you can see that written hundreds of years before Christ it is also somewhat prophetic...

⁵ **Into your hands I commit my spirit;**

deliver me, LORD, my faithful God...

⁹ **Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress;**

my eyes grow weak with sorrow,

my soul and body with grief...

my strength fails because of my affliction,^[b]

and my bones grow weak...

¹² **I am forgotten as though I were dead;**

I have become like broken pottery...

¹⁴ **But I trust in you, LORD;**

I say, "You are my God..."

¹⁶ **Let your face shine on your servant;**

save me in your unfailing love.

This was Jesus' dying prayer. It was prayer of absolute trust in God. From the cross Jesus had **a) forgiven his enemies (Father Forgive Them)** **b) offered mercy to a thief (Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise)** **c) prayed for his mother (Mother Behold Your Son)** **d) come to a place where he felt abandoned by God (Why Have You Forsaken Me?)** **e) expressed his physical thirst... (I thirst)** and then declared the shout of triumph **f) "It is Finished"** and at the very end **g) offers this beautiful prayer in absolute trust in his Father (*Into your hands I commit my spirit*)**

That was a lot to accomplish as you are dying... more than some people do in their entire lives.

But we're not done yet... not quite yet... because then something very significant happened as Jesus said these last words – and this is a very important thing that happened - is mentioned in Matthew, Mark and Luke's gospels.

Does anyone know what that was?

As Jesus said these last words, **3. *The veil of the temple was torn in two.***

When we talk about a veil we often think of flimsy material, like a woman's bridal veil... easily ripped in half. (show netting – not an image)

But the veil of the temple was more like this (show thick material- not an image) It was made of one piece of thick woven tapestried cloth that hung over the Holy of Holies – it was thought to be very dense, tightly woven, and very heavy. It was made of purple, blue and red yarn with images of angels woven into it. This heavy woven curtain hung over... the holiest place in the temple.

The high priest only went in there once a year to atone for the sins of the people. Back in there, in the Holy of Holies, there was the ark of the covenant, and it was a wooden box overlaid with gold with two angels on either end that had their wings folded over to create a seat in the middle of the box that was considered God's seat – it was called the Mercy Seat – the throne of God. And before he went in there, the priest would sacrifice a bull and a goat and then take their blood back into the Holy of Holies (once a year) and sprinkle that on the Mercy Seat... to atone for the sins of the people.

So just in case there was any doubt about what Jesus did on the cross that day; just in case someone didn't get it, or it wasn't clear...

The power of the cross ripped that heavily braided tapestried curtain in two – because that curtain was keeping people out... away from the Holy Place... and God wanted people to come in... Can you imagine the sound of

something this thick, ripping in two? Splitting open with a deep tearing and popping ?

Only the power of the cross....could make that happen. And today, because of Jesus' blood...and his sacrifice...we are able to have this great reunion...

(STATIC IMAGE OF CHILD IN FATHERS EMBRACE FROM YOU TUBE)

Only the power of the cross could bring us into this kind of relationship with our God.....**Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

(keep up image and put text over it) Brought near...like that...

But the problem is, after this enormous ripping in two of that heavy woven fabric so that people could draw near to God, after Christ's agonizing sacrifice on the cross, people still have had their ways of erecting their own veils ...

Even if we have become a Christian and accepted Christ as Lord we can still erect veils of fear, of guilt, of unworthiness, of disappointment with God that distance us from him...

Sometimes my own veil is I am too busy, like Martha, to sit in God's presence and receive that embrace. Sometimes my veil that I hang back up after the power of the cross has ripped it in half, is that I am judgmental and critical of others, and I hold a grudge – ironic after I have been forgiven so much.

I don't know what keeps you at a distance from God today – erecting a veil that Jesus died to rip in two – so we could have that great reunion. But whatever it is...we can ask for forgiveness right now, and ask that the distance we are feeling from God, experiencing, are aware of ...we can ask that Jesus rip our veils ...that we might move towards him and not keep him away...

God says today...No more distance

No more standing far off ...No more fear that I won't come to you.

I am here for you today...come near...

So let's go to prayer now...and just ask that any veil that you may be aware of, any distancing mechanism that you have put up – whatever that is might be forgiven and ripped apart in Jesus' name - that you might experience a reunion right now with the God who loved you enough, and wants to be with you so much that he died for this.... May we all fall into his embrace because of the power of the cross...AMEN

AMEN