

Easter 5, 5.10.2020

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

“My times are in your hand”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Good morning. Thank you for joining us online for worship at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church. We continue to live in extraordinary times. The global pandemic that has altered daily life and its patterns may also be shaping us in ways that we cannot as yet fully appreciate. Wanting to return to normal is a sign that we want life to continue in the patterns we are used to, but at the same time it is perhaps also a sign that we are afraid of change. Daily change in our lives usually comes so slowly that we don’t always notice it, allowing us to adapt easily and comfortably.

However, as human beings we are also shaped by the times in which we live. We are born into a world in which many things have already been decided. Many aspects of the world in which we live were set into motion long before we were born. Language, culture, political and economic systems are things that we learn about through school, family, and society. These institutions, relationships, and experiences also shape us. They shape how we think about ourselves and about others.

When I was growing up I was surrounded by people who are today called “the greatest generation.” This phrase refers to people born between 1901-1927, and who grew up shaped by the events of the Great Depression and the Second World War. These forces of economic want and war marked this generation with qualities of thrift and hard work. It gave them patience and fortitude in the face of challenge and difficulty. The times that shape humanity have been on my mind as I think about the current time in which we live.

What have been significant times in your life that have helped shape who you are becoming? Family, education, work experiences, marriage, children, retirement – are all things that help shape us as human beings. Our human experiences become a lifetime that shapes us. This is something I didn’t understand when I was younger. The accumulation of experiences helps us recognize a larger backdrop of history and time that is also shaping us. Over the course of a lifetime we will participate in several eras, which will impact our view of both time and eternity.

Someone once said to me, “All we truly have is time.” I think what this person meant was our looks, bodies, health, and thoughts change over time. Additionally, we will probably have several jobs, and perhaps more than one career. Material possessions will come and go. Wealth may also come and go. We may live in more than one home and in more than one place. We may live in

more than one country, and come to speak more than one language, thereby gaining a deeper sense of self in the process.

Yet for all of the experiences that shape us over a lifetime, the one thing that seems constant is “time.” We are relatively free to use this time as we wish. We are free to squander and waste it. We may find that, because of illness or misfortune, time comes to mean a great deal more to us than it previously did. We may even wish we could regain time we feel we have lost. This is part of our current dilemma: we want to return to the way times were before the pandemic, so we try to forget it, even attempt to deny it.

Yet as a person of faith, I also believe that time contains eternity. Though each day is unique and different, with each new day we also carry a bit of yesterday and the hope of tomorrow with us. Relationships, obligations, and promises connect yesterday to today and tomorrow, reminding us that Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Christ is what connects the times in which we live to the eternity we have been created for.

Today’s psalm, Psalm 31, reads, “*My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.*” During a time of great global uncertainty, these ancient words are a source of strength. “*My times are in your hand.*” These words are both comforting and illuminating. They remind us that previous generations of people also saw the eternity of God present in the times in which they lived.

The phrase “*My times are in your hand*” sounds deceptively simple, yet the metaphor of “hands” also invites reflection. Hands are for holding, for using tools, and for communicating. Hands also function to lead and point toward goals. Today, on Mother’s Day, we give thanks for Mothers’ hands that held and carried us long before we were able to carry ourselves. We give thanks for mothers’ hands that in caring for us, taught us to care for others.

The psalmist states very plainly “*My times are in your hand, deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.*” These ancient words also reveal our human condition in a harrowing way. The hands of enemies and persecutors continue to be present in our world. Daily, evil and death seek to lay their hands upon humanity. “*The hand of my enemies and persecutors*” is not simply a metaphor, but a statement about the brokenness of our sinful world and its human relationships. Our bodies are prone to infection by bacterial and viral enemies, which open us to

illness and to death. Our lives are haunted by human sinfulness, which persecutes humanity with violence and murder. Many are the hands of our enemies and persecutors.

Yet the psalmist says, *“Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.”* The “steadfast love” of God, in Hebrew *hesed*, describes the way in which God’s hands are at work in the world. The righteousness and justice of God are things that God needs human hands to perform. God needs our hands, yours and mine, to hold and uplift others. God needs our hands, yours and mine, to point toward the triune God who is the source of time and eternity.

In today’s gospel, Jesus’ disciples are troubled and afraid, because Jesus has told them that where he is going they cannot follow. Though the disciples will no longer see him, Jesus commands his disciples to love one another as a sign of his ongoing presence in the world. Then Jesus said to them, *“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.”* Thomas said to him, *“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”* Jesus said to him, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

Hands have power to shape and create. Our hands are made to hold, embrace, and point others toward the way, the truth and the life that is Christ Jesus. Our hands are not made for evil; our hands are for holding and shaping the love of God. May God use our hands to shape and create our communities and world into times of steadfast love and justice.

Today we cry out, *“Our times are in your hand, O Lord.”* Deliver us from the hand of our enemies and persecutors. Save us from the persecution and violence that humans do to one another. Save us from the enemies of pandemic and death. O Lord, use our hands to build up and lift up our neighbors. *Our times are in your hand, O Lord.* You have no hands in this world but ours. Forgive and renew us again today to use our time and our hands for your steadfast love and eternal purpose.

Jesus told his disciples, *“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”* Jesus’ wounded hands were hands of healing, hands of forgiveness, hands of blessing. May whoever sees our hands, see the wounded hands of Jesus. May our wounded hands shape our times. May our wounded hands point to the way, the truth and life. *O Lord, our times are in your hand.* O Lord, bless the work of our hands. Amen.