

"In His Hands" -- Isaiah 49:13-16

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Emmett, Idaho
December 29, 1996
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

During the Advent season I received some correspondence from a young, Christian lady. At the end of her letter, she signed it off, not using the common phrase "sincerely yours," but with the wonderful Christian confession, "In His Hands." I had never seen that subscription before and it struck me as being very appropriate for Christians in general and for this woman in particular. Those words stuck in my mind. So, when it came time to write the sermon for this day and I read the Old Testament Reading for the Sunday after Christmas, I knew what the sermon title and direction would be. Please listen to that reading once again, this time meditating on the words ...

... *In His Hands*

*Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth!
And break out in singing, O mountains!
For the LORD has comforted His people,
And will have mercy on His afflicted.
But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me,
And my Lord has forgotten me."
Can a woman forget her nursing child,
And not have compassion on the son of her womb?
Surely they may forget,
Yet I will not forget you.
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands;
Your walls are continually before Me."*

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God written for us by the Prophet Isaiah.

During the worship services of the Christmas season, the readings, hymns, and sermons take us in spirit and in truth, to the manger scene in Bethlehem where Jesus was born to Mary. Faithful shepherds, who tend their flocks, invite and encourage the people under their care, *Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.* With the darkness and wonder of the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, we see the Baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay, doing so as we sing *Silent Night*. On Christmas Day, what was a silent scene is now a quiet morning, as the Mother of God nurses the Creator of the universe, pondering all these things in her heart. She looks at Him and counts His tiny toes.

You, dear people, look at Jesus and count His little fingers. Had you been there and placed your pinky under His fingers, He would have curled His fingers around yours and given you an infant grip - in medical circles called the Palmar Grasp Reflex - a grip from the Hand of God, designed in eternity and given in time. Now uncurl those Divine fingers and peer into the soft palms of the Creator's hands. *In His hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is His also. The sea is His, and He made it: and His hands formed the dry land.* Therefore, dear people of the Lord, let us go to Bethlehem, *O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker (Psalm 95).*

*What Child is this, Who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?*

What Child is this? The Holy Word of God tells us the answer. This Child is the Word and *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.* O you pilgrims to Bethlehem's manger, listen to the Good News: *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth (John 1).*

Gaze into His hands, but gaze deeper than the deep places of the earth. Do you see what I see? Bend down closer, smelling the manger's straw and examining those tiny hands. There! Right there, you and I are there. Do you see us in the hands of the living God? But wait, is that good or bad? What does this mean? *For we know Him Who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10).* That's really quite terrifying! Is the picture of God and the individual Christian as is depicted in a sermon entitled: "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" where God holds the sinner on the end of a cobweb, dangling him or her over the boiling cauldrons of hell, just waiting - just looking for a reason to release the wretched creature? Is that what it means to be *In His Hands*? It is if you think Jesus is a new Moses - a new Lawgiver come to exact more law, greater demands, and cracking a longer whip with an ever-increasing bite to it.

Please dear children of God, focus your eyes and look closer into the Infant's hands, beyond the deep places of the earth and deeper than the flaming cauldrons of hell. On the palms of the Baby's hands something is engraved. The Lord says, *"See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands."* O beloved Christian, you are there; inscribed in the two palms of the hands of the Lord God Almighty! *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him (Ephesians 1).* From eternity you have been in the mind of God and inscribed in the palms of His hands.

When we draw a picture of someone, we might use a pencil or pen, chalk or charcoal, or a paintbrush and palette. But what has God used to inscribe you in the palms of His hands? Look at the palms of His hands to discover the engraving tools. Do you see what I see? A crude hammer and iron spikes have engraved us *In His Hands.* *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53).*

The holy ink used to inscribe us in the palms of His hands is nothing less than the Blood of God. Your names have been *written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13)*. The Book of Life is the Hand of God, the very place where we have been inscribed in the palms of His hands. We have been called into the fold of the Good Shepherd Who declares, exercises, and continuously employs the Divine palmar grasp: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, Who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are One" (John 10)*.

Sometimes, however, the Church gathers about the manger and hymns the question, "What Child is this? Why lies He in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding. Good Christian, fear; for sinners here, the silent Word is pleading." And sometimes, because the life we live is often difficult, even good Christians are heard to say and ask, "But the Word is silent and I need to hear from Him. I need to know that He is real and here. *"The LORD has forsaken me, And my Lord has forgotten me."*

The Lord responds by asking a question of His own, *"Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb?"* When we remove all the pious platitudes from our minds about the powerful love of motherhood, we must answer "yes." Such love of one human being for another is limited. When we come down to earth and realize that we live in a world where some mothers abandon their children by choice, and other mothers lose their children despite all the love and care and compassion and desire and hope and fervent prayers and prenatal care and modern technologies that are humanly possible to summon, throw at, staunch, and hold back death.

In the darkness of this world's night, mothers silently sob and fathers openly weep because they begin to forget what a beloved child, whose death has taken it from loving parents' arms, - they begin to forget what their child looked like. *"Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb?"* The answer from such mothers and fathers is "yes." The Lord's answer is the same. *"Yes, surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands."*

And on the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side (John 20). The Resurrection of Jesus means that death is not the end - the grave is not the victor. It means that the holy wounds of God have prevailed and that the death that still separates, has been conquered and is but a door that separates for a time. It will not always separate and Christian mother and son, father and daughter will be reunited on the Day. *For the Lord has comforted His people, And will have mercy on His afflicted*. Therefore, no matter whether it be grandfather or granddaughter, husband or wife, *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints (Psalm 116)*.

The seemingly silent Word is still pleading for you, just as He did on the day of His Birth, for now *He always lives to make intercession (Hebrews 7)* for you and me. All of that, dear people, right there in Bethlehem's manger. What is your reaction to what you have seen and heard? What should you do? We may pray in the morning before arising and in the evening before closing our eyes, "Lord, into Thy Hands I commend myself; my body and soul and all things." Whether young or old, you may follow the example of Simeon as he took the Baby Jesus *up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word; for mine*

eyes have seen Thy Salvation Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of Thy people Israel."

In His Hands is a good way to sign off a letter that you have written. It is a confession of the faith believed. *In His Hands* is an excellent way to sign off one's life. It is a confession of the faith lived.

Therefore,

*Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth!
And break out in singing, O mountains!
For the LORD has comforted His people,
And will have mercy on His afflicted.
... I will not forget you.
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands;
Your walls are continually before Me."*

Amen. *In His Hands*. Amen.