

MIDWEEK LENTEN SERVICE 6
April 9, 2025
THE HAND OF THE LORD WHO HOLDS ALL THINGS
Text: John 3:11–18, 22–36

Our hands, those **“instruments of instruments,”** as the ancient physician Galen called them, are central to our interaction with the world. They can heal or hurt, build or break, and symbolize power, control, and personal connection. From everyday phrases like **“lend a hand”** to the significance of **“handmade”** in our modern age, we understand the importance of these incredible tools.

The Bible, too, speaks to us through the language of hands. In the Old Testament, the **“hand of the Lord”** appears over two hundred times, signifying God’s creation, power, judgment, and salvation. In the New Testament, this concept takes on a profound literal meaning. Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, possessed real, tangible hands. Through these hands, He performed miracles of healing, feeding, and resurrection, demonstrating His merciful and personal connection to us.

Yet, the Bible also reveals the destructive potential of human hands, culminating in the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ, who was **“delivered into the hands of men.”** However, even in this act, the hand of the Lord was at work, offering salvation through Christ’s sacrifice. His pierced hands, once laid still, now hold us securely, and no one can snatch us from His grasp.

Tonight, we [continue] explore the powerful symbolism and literal actions of hands throughout Scripture. We’ll witness how God uses His hands to create, redeem, and restore, and how He transforms our flawed, self-serving hands into instruments of His grace, service, and praise.

'He's got the whole world in His hands.' That's from an old African American spiritual, a song that's been sung for generations in countless ways. We don't even know who wrote it, but its message has resonated since it first appeared in print back in 1927. And you know, you could keep adding verses forever, just listing all the things God holds—because, of course, that 'He' we're talking about is our Lord. This isn't just a catchy tune, though. It's a song of deep trust. It reminds us that even when the world feels chaotic, even when things seem stacked against us, God is in control.

And you know, when you really think about it, Psalm 95 captures that same spirit beautifully. Listen to these words: 'Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let's shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation! Let's come before Him with thanksgiving and sing joyful praises!' Right? It's that same feeling of exuberant trust. The Psalmist goes on, 'For the Lord is a great God, a great King above all gods. In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him too. The sea is His, for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land.' Just like our hymn, it emphasizes God's power and control. And then, it calls us to worship: 'Oh, come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For He is our God, and we are the people He shepherds, the sheep of His hand.' It's that image of being held, protected, and guided by God's loving hand that connects so perfectly with 'He's got the whole world in His hands.

So, what does this all mean? It means that truly, everything in all of creation rests in the Lord's hands. Our very lives, every moment of them—past, present, and future—are held securely by

Him. From the dawn of creation to its ultimate fulfillment, it's all in His hands. That simple, powerful truth: 'He's got the whole world in His hands.'

But here's the thing. We're constantly trying to grab that control back. We want to be the ones in charge, not God. We get this illusion that we're steering the ship. You know, I read this fascinating article from CNN a while back, called 'Illusion of Control: Why the World Is Full of Buttons That Don't Work.' And it really hit home. It talked about how we're surrounded by these 'placebo buttons'—things that make us *feel* like we're in control, even when we're not. Think about those crosswalk buttons in some cities, the ones that don't actually do anything. Or that 'close door' button in the elevator. You press it, but the doors seem to close whenever they want, right? But pressing it gives you that little sense of, 'Okay, I'm doing something!'

We love that feeling, don't we? And it's not just buttons. We're bombarded with notifications, dings, buzzes, all those 'new messages,' 'new reminders,' 'breaking news' alerts on our phones. It feels like we're constantly 'doing,' constantly responding, constantly trying to stay on top of everything. But at the end of the day, it's exhausting. It feels like we're running in place, or even worse, like our hands are tied.

And then, you add in the big stuff, the things we *know* we can't control—world events, global crises, the sheer uncertainty of life. It can make you want to throw your hands up in the air and just ask, 'Does He *really* have the whole world in His hands?' Because sometimes, our explanations, our attempts to make sense of it all, just fall flat. Sometimes, we just don't have the answers.

And amid all this, John the Baptist, that powerful voice in the wilderness, speaks a profound truth. He knew the Messiah was coming, and then, he knew He was here. And what did John say? He boldly declared, 'The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.' Think about that: *all things*. And then, John goes on to say, 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.' It's a stark reminder that this isn't just a philosophical idea; it's a reality with eternal consequences. God has placed everything in Jesus' hands, and our response matters.

Think about who Jesus is. He's the Word made flesh, the very embodiment of God. He existed before anything else, and everything that exists was created through Him. John the Baptist, he's just echoing that fundamental truth. If you truly want to understand God, if you want to know His heart, look to Jesus. When you hear the words of Christ, you're hearing the very voice of God Himself. The Father sent His Son, He loves His Son, and He has entrusted

And this truth of Christ's authority, it's so powerful that it's been captured in art for centuries. You've probably seen images of Jesus holding a globe, right? It's a visual representation of this very point: Christ *does* have the whole world in His hands. He is King, He has ultimate authority.

But here's the paradox, the stunning contradiction: He came to us in humility. He didn't arrive with a crown and a conquering army. No, He came as a baby, lived a simple life, and then... the world turned on Him. They laughed, they mocked, they spat on Him. They nailed Him to a cross. 'If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!' they jeered. (Matthew 27:40)

That's what *our* hands have done. From outward appearances, it looked like He was utterly defeated, powerless. It certainly didn't look like He had the whole world in His hands, did it?

Now, remember a few weeks ago, we talked about the Isenheim Altarpiece, that incredibly powerful painting of the crucifixion? It's an intense piece of art. And something fascinating about it is that it includes John the Baptist in the scene. Now, historically, John wasn't there at the crucifixion. He was long gone. But the artist included him for a very specific reason: to drive home a crucial truth.

And how does he do that? John is depicted with this incredibly long, almost exaggerated finger, pointing directly at Jesus on the cross. And alongside that image, you see the words, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' (John 3:30) John knew his role. He wasn't the main event. He was the pointer, the herald, the one who directed people to Jesus.

Think of it like Moses, who lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness. People were dying from snake bites, and God told Moses to create a remedy, a symbol of healing. And just as Moses pointed to that serpent, John is pointing to Christ—the one who offers eternal salvation, the one lifted up on the cross to take away our sins.

And here's the amazing truth: the hand of the Lord was in control the *entire* time. Even in that moment of apparent defeat, when it looked like chaos and despair had won, God was working His plan. The whole world was in His hands as He was enacting salvation, not just for a select few, but for the *entire* world.

He healed us through His suffering. He brought salvation through His crucifixion. He brought forgiveness through His death. And then, on the third day, He rose again, bringing us justification, declaring us righteous. He ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He reigns even now.

And one day, the whole world, every single person, will know beyond any doubt that He *does* have the whole world in His hands. That's the promise we cling to, the hope we hold onto.

And it doesn't stop there. Jesus' hand isn't just a historical fact; it's actively at work *today*, through His church. Think about it: Jesus' hand is present when we baptize, when we teach, when we share the good news.

His hand is at work when we see the promises of Baptism poured out on the heads of young and old, a tangible sign of His grace and love. His hands are at work when we receive His body and blood in communion, a real and powerful connection to Him. His hands are at work when we open the Scriptures, and He illuminates the words of God, revealing His truth to us.

Our whole lives, every aspect of them, are held securely in His hands. That's not just a comforting thought; it's a living reality.

And this truth, this understanding that everything is in God's hands, changes how we use our *own* hands in this world. We don't have ultimate control, that's for sure. But God *does* use our hands, in our daily lives—at home, at work, in our communities, in the church—to love and serve our neighbors.

Knowing that our eternal lives are secure in His hands gives us remarkable freedom. Freedom to reach out, to extend His love, to deliver His gifts to those who are hurting, those who are in need.

Everything is in Jesus' hands. All of history, from beginning to end, is in His hands. Our lives, every moment of them, are in His hands. Your future, your salvation, are held securely in His hands. He's got the whole world in His hands. And that, my friends, is good news. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

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