

EASTER VIGIL
“THE HAND OF THE LORD
WHO MADE US”
Text: Genesis 1:1–2:3

Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

The very one through whom all things came to be has been raised from the dead! He is the hand of the Lord, our Creator, actively working for us, even now!

Think for a moment about the satisfaction of making something with your own two hands. Whether it's the simple act of preparing a meal, the focused work of fixing a car, the satisfying project of building a shed, or the careful task of repairing something broken, it all involves intention, a purpose that leads to completion. There's a deep fulfillment in bringing beauty, order, and usefulness into the often-chaotic world around us.

When we look at the very beginning, we see that our Lord also delights in creating with order. He brought forth the entire universe in six days and then rested on the seventh. But God's creative power is very different from our own limited efforts. He created absolutely everything out of nothing. We, on the other hand, always need something to start with – raw materials, tools, and so on. But the Lord needed none of that. Simply by speaking His powerful Word, He brought all things into existence. The crowning jewel of His creation was humanity, whom He lovingly formed in His own image from the very dust of the earth. **“Male and female He created them,”** giving them the special role of caring for His magnificent creation. We have meaning and purpose because God intentionally made each one of us. He made all of this, the entire cosmos and us, out of nothing.

Sadly, there's a deceptive idea that's taken root in our world, the lie that this incredible universe is just a random series of accidents, the result of matter that has always existed blindly bumping into itself—a big bang. But if you truly follow that line of thinking to its logical conclusion, a world that wasn't created with intention offers no real foundation for **the essential value of human life**, for **objective truth**, for **a clear understanding of right and wrong**, and certainly not for **the profound beauty that surrounds us**. That view stands in hash opposition to our Lord, who created everything out of nothing. It's almost as if it tries to reduce everything to meaningless chance... and it brings a devastating emptiness to so many.

But here's the liberating truth: you aren't a cosmic mistake. You aren't an accidental byproduct of nature. Each and every one of you was intentionally and lovingly made by our gracious Creator. You were formed with a specific purpose in God's heart. King David, speaking to God as he penned the words of Psalm 139: **“For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well.”** The Lord Himself formed and shaped each one of you. From the very moment of your conception, He gave you a unique blueprint, a set of DNA unlike any other. He gave you a heart that began to beat in the early weeks of life. Even your unique fingerprints started to form in the first few months. Each of you has been lovingly **“knitted together” in your mother's womb**. You are **“fearfully and wonderfully made.”** That, my friends, is the very hand of God at work in your life, from the very beginning.

God has created us with a distinct purpose, making us stewards, or caretakers, of His incredible creation. It's no wonder that, in our own limited way, the Lord has gifted us with the desire to shape and order this world with function and beauty. But even at its best, this inborn desire has been marred and twisted by sin in our fallen world. The work of our hands, which should bring joy, has often become a heavy burden. We can't even cultivate the land without ***the sweat of our brow!*** Creation itself often seems wild and untamable, beyond our control. Our sin distorts the creative endeavors of our hands, leading us to the arrogant desire to be more than mere creatures, to be in control ourselves. Just as Adam and Eve foolishly desired to be their own gods, we too often fall into the same trap.

Our sin leads us to believe that we can simply take things into our own hands and fashion our lives according to our own flawed plans, neglecting God's wise and loving created order. There's a reason why this world is so broken – we're the cause of it. Sin entered God's perfect creation because our first parents thought they knew better than God. And the work of human hands, (our hands), has brought about terrible catastrophe. It didn't take long before Cain had the blood of his own brother Abel on his hands. And even today, we see the continued devastating effects of sin across the earth in the sinful assault on people created in the very image of God. Lord, have mercy! We've so defaced and marred the image of God in ourselves and in others that it is often unrecognizable. The work of sinful human hands, our hands, ultimately leads to death. And tragically, our own hands are utterly unable to fix this basic problem. Our futile attempts at re-creating paradise on our own terms only lead to greater failure. Our only true hope lies in the fact that the hand of the Lord is still at work, even in the midst of our brokenness.

In John, chapter 1, we hear these words: ***"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."*** And then, in verse 14, the incredible truth is revealed: ***"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."***

That Word is Jesus. Everything that exists, from the smallest atom to the hugest galaxy, was brought into being through Jesus. He is the very **hand of the Lord**, our Creator, actively at work in the world. And in His deep love for us, He took on real flesh-and-blood human hands in the incarnation. He became fully human, like us in every respect except for sin. He's God in all His infinite creative power, now living among us in human form. He's the only one who has the divine ability to truly re-create this world that we've turned into such a chaotic mess.

Jesus has come to restore the very image of God within us, the image that has been so tragically marred by our rebellion. St. Paul tells us that Jesus ***"is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."*** He took our fallen humanity into His own hands, and willingly died for us on the cross to buy us back from the clutches of sin and death. Throughout our journey through Lent, we've proclaimed Jesus, whose powerful hand has been at work to set this broken world right – casting out demons that enslave, healing diseases that isolate, and even raising the dead to new life. All this miraculous work of the Lord's hand has been a clear and undeniable testimony to who He truly is: **the one through whom all things were created in the first place.** He is the beginning of a new creation, a restoration that only God Himself could bring about. He is the only one who has the authority and the power to truly forgive sins. He did all the necessary work to atone for our sins on the cross on a Friday, the sixth day of the week, echoing the completion of the first creation. It was the day when He completed everything He came to do. When He cried out, ***"It is finished!"*** there was nothing

left undone. And on Holy Saturday, the seventh day, the Sabbath, He rested from all His exhausting labor in the tomb. But He didn't remain in that tomb! On the first day of the new week... He rose. It was a Sunday, the day we now celebrate in the dawning light of Easter. Sunday, the eighth day, is the first day of a new creation! Because Christ's resurrection is vitally different from all the other times when people were raised from the dead in the Scriptures. All those others eventually died again. But He rose from the dead to never die again. Christ's resurrection is the beginning, the powerful first act of God's new creation breaking into our old, broken world. Because a day is coming when all of creation will be fully restored, completely renewed on the day of His triumphant return. Those who stubbornly reject Him will be raised to judgment. But all who believe in Him... who cling to Him in faith, will be raised to everlasting life in His glorious presence!

How is it then that we come to believe this life-changing truth? Until that final day of complete restoration, God is still actively creating faith where there was none. By the powerful Word of God, which comes to us from outside ourselves, God speaks directly into our ears and our hearts. He creates faith in people who were once far off, estranged from Him. But this saving faith isn't something we conjure up ourselves. It's merely the open hands that gratefully receive the incredible gift that He has already accomplished for us through His life, death, and resurrection. It is all grace, all gift. ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*** Faith itself is a precious gift - God's own powerful work within us. This saving faith doesn't look inward at our own feeble efforts, but always looks outward, with complete trust, to God's unwavering promises: His creating, redeeming, and sanctifying Word; His promises powerfully splashed upon us in the waters of Holy Baptism; and His promises tangibly fed to us in Jesus' own body and blood in the Lord's Supper. We can never do enough, no matter how hard we try, to accomplish true rest and reconciliation with God on our own. But because of Christ's finished work on the cross and His glorious resurrection, we now live in His Sabbath rest, a rest accomplished not by our hands, but by His. Our salvation does not depend on us in any way, but solely and completely on the gracious work of Christ, the Word made flesh, fully God and fully human, for us!

Paul writes, ***"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*** And now, as people who have been redeemed and made new by the powerful work of His hand, we're His very own workmanship, His masterpiece. Again, this is all by Christ's perfect merit alone! Even the good works that we do flow from Him as a natural response to the gift of faith He's given us. These good works follow faith; they are not a basis for our salvation in any way, nor do they improve our standing before God in the slightest. Because we're saved **by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone**. This changes everything! We have no need to constantly strive to justify ourselves through the work of our own hands. Instead, God now lovingly uses our hands, our lives, to do the ***"good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*** He's graciously given us these good works as a way to live out our gratitude and love, and He equips our hands to love and serve our neighbors simply because our neighbors are in need, because they too are precious in His sight. Our God, who has created us, redeemed us, and is continually making us holy, receives all the glory, now and forever!

Moses put it so beautifully in Psalm 90:

Let Your work be shown to Your servants, and Your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!

And God does this very thing as the gracious work of His own hand. His ultimate work has been shown to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ! His glorious power to save us has been revealed not in worldly might, but in the seeming **foolishness of the cross**, leading to the ultimate triumph of the resurrection. We have God's undeserved favor not because of anything we have done, but because of the complete forgiveness of our sins, accomplished once and for all by Jesus, whose own hands were pierced for our sake. But those nail-scarred hands are now the glorious hands of the One who lives and reigns forevermore! Because... Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!** In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The Hand of the Lord Who Made Us