

MY TIMES ARE IN YOUR HANDS

PSALM 31

Fifth Sunday of Eastertide | May 10, 2020

Community CRC | Kitchener ON

Sisters and brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ, maybe it's just me, but it seems like time is kind of funny right now. Kind of off. This is the ninth week that we will be worshipping as households rather than as an assembled people. Nine weeks! And in that nine weeks, most of us have been locked up in our homes. It feels like the time has flown by. Like, did April even happen? And at the same time that the calendar seems to be zipping through one week after another, a day seems to last forever. Time is going so slow, and so fast, at the same time.

Because we're at home all the time, we've had to find new rhythms and routines to mark our days, to keep some appearance of order and sanity in our lives. One of my new rituals is that I wake up with John Ryan every morning and listen to the news on the radio while he eats his breakfast and plays...that way Ashley gets a little bit of extra sleep. One of these mornings, I'm not even going to try to guess what day it was, I was listening to the radio and the host of the radio show was interviewing a couple with young kids, and the dad said, "We don't have good days and bad days anymore. We have good hours and bad hours."

That really resonated with me. The days go too slow right now for the whole thing to be good, or the whole thing to be bad. To paraphrase a Bible verse into our current situation, "each hour has enough trouble of its own."

There are blessings and losses in this disruption of our normal rituals, of course. Some of us are enjoying the extra time with our families and roommates, taking the opportunity to bake, play video games, blazing through those books or shows that we've been meaning to enjoy. Others of us are struggling to carve out a workspace somewhere in our chaotic homes, free from the grating whines of "Mom! Mommy! Mom! Maaaa!" or "I'm hungry" or "I'm bored." Some of us are getting back into lost rhythms of family meals, devotions, prayer, exercise, and family movie night. Others of us can't wait for daycares and school to open back up again, or for the opportunity to escape to a coffee shop or movie theatre for a few hours.

Many of us are having to find different and creative ways to celebrate milestones, or mourn the ones we're missing—birthdays, anniversaries, vacations, family camping. For our students, the regular rituals around class trips, prom, graduation, and campus tours have all been stripped away. Births and weddings and funerals look very different than what we're used to, and families grieve the loss of normal even when they are celebrating. In the life of our own church, today would have been our Sunday School graduation service, when our Grade 6 children mark the end of their years in Sunday School and we welcome their presence and participation in our full worship service.

Pastor Carel and Irene, me and Ashley, we're finding ourselves in the strange situation of saying goodbye in a time when the regular rituals and markers of leave-taking aren't available to us. We can't give hugs, go on visits, grab a coffee, or share memories in the ways we had imagined our final months here at this church. It hardly feels real.

Time is all funny right now.

So it struck me, as I was reading our Psalm for today, that in the midst of this prayer of faith to God in the midst of social isolation, as the Psalmist shares thoughts of feeling attacked, alone, and abandoned, that the Psalmist writes, in verse 15: "*My times are in your hands.*"

My times are in your hands. That's a weird thing to say. *My times are in your hands.* What does that mean? What are "my times"?

It's not a phrase we use very often. "My time." I guess we use it sometimes for me-time, right? Like, don't bother me right now. This is "my time." Kind of a self-care thing. I need some time to myself.

Or we use it when we talk about death and dying. "His time" has come. "Her time" is up. He's on "borrowed time."

But here, the Psalmist says "*My time...is in your hands,*" referring to God.

On the one hand it's a reminder of God's power and sovereignty, right? That God is in control of everything.

But I couldn't help but think this week about the fact that God is eternal, that God stands outside of time—unchanging, immutable, infinite. We worship a God who *acts* in time, who *moves* in history, but who is not *bound* by time. He stands outside and above it all.

The Alpha and the Omega. The First and the Last. The Beginning and the End. Past, present, and future. He holds it all.

And this truth, the truth that God stands outside of time, can give us great comfort in times when time seems funny, unreliable even. Because even in times of distress, times of trouble, times of darkness, we can confess that God is our Rock, our Fortress, our Bulwark, our Refuge. In life and in death, we belong to God.

This truth shapes the way that Christians experience and understand history, too. Willie James Jennings, a theologian at Yale, says that the goal of telling history is not simply being a historian or thinking historically, but to help us see the past blossoming into a future of hope that helps us to make sense of our present situation. Telling our history helps us see God's action in the past blossoming into a future of hope that helps us to make sense of our present situation. It's about being witnesses to a larger story.

And this means that when we tell our story, even painful memories are washed in the redemptive power of Jesus' blood. For the people of God in the Old Testament, the passover meal was a reminder that God rescued them when they were slaves in Egypt. This ritual, this meal, this story, was preserved as a symbol of hope for God's people when they were conquered by their enemies and sent into exile. A reminder and assurance that the unchanging God who rescued them once would rescue them again. God's action in the past blossoming into a future of hope that helps us to make sense of our present situation.

And we see this time and time again in the stories and rituals of the oppressed. The theologian James Cone tells how for African American Christians under slavery, threatened with death if they put pen to paper, history was preserved not only through writings scrawled with charcoal on the inside of quilts and dresses, but through song, through food, through dance, through story. Richard Twiss, a Lakota theologian, likewise tells how even as their elders were killed and their land being taken away, the Sioux people preserved their history through chant, dance, ritual, and art.

In times of trouble, a people's history is preserved by ritual and rhythm, song and dance, food and drink; by the stories passed down from elders to children, from one generation to the next. Witnessing to God's action in the past blossoming into a future of hope that helps us to make sense of our present situation. And what a better way to explain

what worship is. In worship we bear witness to God's love through all generations, from the beginning of history to our present day. We proclaim the mighty acts of God, his power, his love, and his grace. We remember God's faithfulness in times of old, and we look forward with hope to the future he has promised us. And in it all, we feel his comforting presence in our hearts, as we are united with him. Past, present, and future—our times are in your hands. As we remember, as we draw near, as we look ahead with hope—our times are in your hands. In darkness and in light, in sorrow and in joy, in death and in life—our times are in your hands. You are our rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save us, the one who leads and guides us all our days. We trust in you and say "You are our God!" Our times are in your hands!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.