

“More Rock of Faith 3: Held in the Hand of God”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden for FUMC
Grand Junction, Sunday, September 4, 2022

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/worship-services>

Scripture Text: Psalm 37:3-5, 7a, 23-24 [NLT]

OPENING

🎵 “I Want to Hold Your Hand” (The Beatles)

Many of the classic rock songs of our culture carry messages that lend themselves to exploration in worship because either:

- (1) They reinforce elements of Biblical themes / Christian theology OR
- (2) They are critiqued by them.

This piece launched The Beatles to superstardom in February of 1964, and it signaled what came to be called the British Invasion of rock music and culture in the US in the 1960's.

I wasn't quite 2 years old when “I Want to Hold Your Hand” evoked the out-of-control emotions of the teenage concert-going public in our nation, but The Beatles' presence in our family was profound in my formative years owing to the devotion of one of my brothers to the “Fab Four”.

But, I “caught the bug” many years later – and not many years ago – when I heard a version of this piece on *Glee*, sung by Kurt Hummel, the character played

by the enormously talented Chris Colfer. (*Brief telling of the story, which helped me to get “unstuck” from “I Want to Hold Your Hand” being about teenage romance and allowing it to speak to much deeper needs in our lives – those having to do with the need for security, safety, and connection – even physical connection – with others. *Glee* and intentional character development: very defined stereotypes. This made the characters' stepping beyond the bounds that much more powerful, like Burt reaching for Kurt's hand at the funeral of Kurt's mother.*)

And then just a couple of weeks ago, I was meeting with my clergy circuit group, and we were discussing intimacy with God. Well, one of my colleagues said something to the effect of there being times when he just wanted “to hold God's hand”. And this song and that story from *Glee* came rocketing out of “deep storage” in my memory banks, and I felt I understood its deepest meanings. Hence, its place in worship today.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

And I got to thinking about the many ways that God's longing for intimacy with us or our longing for intimacy with God is expressed in Scripture.

“I have loved you with an everlasting love...”

– God to the people of Israel in Jer. 31:3

“God so loved the world...” – Jesus in John 3:16

“I know that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...”

– Jonah to God in Jonah 4:2

And this one is enough to make one blush:

*“As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.*

“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

– the Psalmist in Psalm 42:1-2

And then there are the last couple of verses lifted up in the Scripture reading this morning...

“The Lord directs the steps of the godly.

“He delights in every detail of their lives.

*“Though they stumble, they will never fall,
for the Lord holds them by the hand.”*

– the Psalmist in Psalm 37:23-24

And how about the Scripture verses that make some kind of reference to God holding us in His hands?

“Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.”

– God to the people of Israel in Isaiah 41:10

*“I lie awake thinking of you,
meditating on you through the night.*

“Because you are my helper,

I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings.

“I cling to you;

your strong right hand holds me securely.”

– The Psalmist in Psalm 63:6-8

*“Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?*

“Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

“See, I have ...[carved] you on the palms of my hands;”

– God to the people of Israel in Isaiah 49:15-16

Finally, Jesus in John 15:13

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

And we all know that Jesus did exactly that, in fulfillment of His Father’s desire to express in the strongest terms available His deep love for humanity.

SERMON THOUGHTS

This is wonderfully good news this morning, my friends, and we need that today.

No matter what challenges you and I face, we can say with the Apostle Paul:

“I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

– Romans 8:38-39

And therefore, “I can do and face all things through Him who gives me strength.” – Paul in Phil 4:13

(*End as in *Glee*: 🎵 “Oh yeah, I...I’ll tell you somethin’ I think you’ll understand. When I say that somethin’...I wanna hold...”*)

Straight into [Communion](#) with Words of Institution