

## **Sermon Notes for April 25 Easter IV**

### **“He’s got the whole world in his hands.”**

Did you sing it as a child?

We did; what a song of comfort in difficult times.

Everybody, brother, sister, tiny little baby.

“In his hands.”

### **To be in the hands of God sounded like a very good thing to small children in the 1970s.**

We worshiped a rather genial god, of course, who would hold us quite carefully.

Who was likely to bless our actions.

Who would agree with us about our good nature;

Who shared our pleasant and positive outlook on life.

The hands we imagined were soft and protective.

### **That view in some tension with other thoughts about being in the hands of God**

Hebrews 10:31 “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Never once had that thought in Vacation Bible School.

There also the writer of Hebrews remembers the Lord saying in

Deuteronomy:

“Vengeance is mine; I will repay.”

To be in the hands of God is judgment; like being in the hands of the law.

### **The most famous sermon in American history**

*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*

1741 in the congregational church in Enfield, Connecticut

Jonathan Edwards the preacher.

Picture the cupped hands of God holding your soul over the flames of hell.

*O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: 'tis a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell; you hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing*

*about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment, [except his protective hand, which may be withdrawn at any time.]*

**So Edwards thought it a wonderful thing to be in hands of God**

Those hands a metaphor God's will, the only thing that held us back from the Pit.

Being in an angry God's hands might sound bad to you,  
But it is better than the alternative, Edwards insisted.  
Eternal damnation and endless suffering.

**You Episcopalians are a long way from being fearful about the hands of God.**

We are not like the anxious saints of old.

We come forward to the table each week without fear and trembling  
I presume few of you are up all night wondering if you among the elect.

We do not pour our hearts out in anguished spiritual diaries as many of the saints of old did.

**We are often told that anxiety is a bad thing; family systems theory.**

I agree but might also wish for a little more anxiety in our Christian practice.

St. Paul speaks about anxiety in 1 Corinthians 7.

Saying that we who have one foot in the world and one in the kingdom are in a tight spot.

He says our anxiety about wives and husbands and children and the affairs of this world mean that our interest is divided.

And thus we are not anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord.

**We might work together on building an appropriate anxiety on John 10**

There Jesus speaks about his sheep.

Those who

hear his voice.

follow him.

see his works and know him to be one with the Father.

**There are three questions worth feeling a gentle anxiety about.**

Are you hearing the voice of Jesus, in prayer and scripture?

Is it your first desire to follow him in all things?

Do you share in the work that Jesus still does and see the Father in it?

**A great word of comfort and assurance here**

John 10:28b “No one can snatch (my sheep) out of my hand.”

He won't lose us; he won't allow us to perish.

**But we've got to be his sheep to be in his hand.**

We must be anxious to hear his voice.

anxious to follow him in all things.

anxious to be part of the work he still does.

**It is our greatest blessing to be in the hands of God.**

It is not so easy as the children's song has it, however.

But neither is it so terrible as Jonathan Edwards imagined.

**To be in the hands of Jesus, the God-Man is to be in the hands of**

one who sympathized with us in our weakness

one knows the struggle of a human life

one who loved and struggled and suffered and died.

one who loves us in our brokenness.

**But one as well who challenges us**

to love and serve

to sacrifice and obey for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

**His hands are marked, of course, by the marks of the cross.**

The cross; that great sign of the extent of the love of God.

The cross; that great judgment on our fallen world

The cross; that great invitation to a sacrificed, surrendered life.

To be in his crucified and risen hands is challenge and demand **and**  
life and hope and peace.

Thanks be to God that we are in the hands of such a Savior, one who  
loves us and who continually invites us closer to himself.