

One story Judy tells about her childhood experience in church has to do with the Rev. Harvey Goodling. Namely, his hands. Judy remembers him holding her hand while greeting the adults leaving worship. For Judy, the recollection centers not so much on the enormity of his grown-up hand. Rather, it was the feeling of well-being in what was to her sacred space and presence.

Would that all God's children of any age had such an experience of assurance in another's hand. When I briefly served as a chaplain at a juvenile detention center, the residual effect of other experiences of hands were all too clear. Violence learned as children from hands swung down on them in physical abuse, and now replicated in their own acts of violence. Worse yet, hands that sexually abused them as children, imprinting so deeply it lashed out in their own abuse of others.

It is not just human hands that are freighted with potential for good or ill, bringing assurance or imposing self-loathing. How do we view the hands of God? As instruments of divine retribution, gladly raised to strike down sinners much as in Jonathan Edward's (in)famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of Angry God?" As hands raised in blessing of the ones who think and believe and act and look like us, while those same hands point accusing fingers at all others? How we view God's hands will surely shape what relationship we seek – or flee from – with God. And how our views (and then reflections) of God's hands will speak volumes to those on the outside of religious communities looking in, wondering if they want to be anywhere near such hands.

So let me put my cards on the table (or as they say, show my hand) to the divine hands I understand and experience. It begins with the hand of God symbolized in Rev. Goodling's. Hands that bring assurance of well-being. It includes the hand portrayed on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, where God's hand reaches out in creation to spark human life made in the image of God. Or, in the case of Psalm 31, such hands as we can entrust the totality of our times and lives into, whether the immediate moment we face is one of joy or threat or doubt . . . or death's door.

*My times are in your hands.*

***For Reflection and Action:***

*Whose hands, and lives, have framed your understanding of the hands of God; how?*

*When has "my times are in your hands" been your prayer of trust; your cry for help?*

*In what ways might Our Saviour provide such hands as this psalm affirms here;*

*or even, help make such trust of and en-trusting to God possible?*