

2CHRISTMAS 2010 - "All Time Is In Your Hands, O Lord"  
John 1:1-18

Let's begin with prayer. Gracious God, you have wonderfully created and more wonderfully sustained the life you have given us. Keep us this day from all that would harm us. Preserve in us a vibrant faith that is eager to give you praise. O God, you have been our help in ages past, be with us as we step into the future trusting in your grace given to us in Jesus Christ your son our Lord. Amen.

This is going to be a "class participation" sermon. You get to help me deliver the sermon today. Your part will be to sing the verses of a great hymn of praise appropriate for the beginning of the new year. It is hymn #320. Please take out your green hymnal and open to hymn #320 and we'll begin.

Let's sing together the **first** verse of hymn 320.

"Oh God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come. Our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home."

We turned the page on a new **year and** a new **decade** this week. As we begin a new year it is good to look back and to see that **God is faithful**. God has preserved the church for over 2000 years. But that is not all. The whole earth has been sustained by God's mighty power. It has been sustained for a purpose. God has plans for this earth, plans for you and for me. As the Epistle lesson says, "**he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.**" (Ephesians 1:4) You have been on God's mind a long, long time. God's plan for all creation is tangled up with who we are and what we are to become. Those plans are in an inexorable process of moving toward God's ultimate future. And a glorious future it will be. God is with us, we need not be afraid.

The Gospel lesson for today reinforces this thought. John 1:1-3 says, "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.**" God created this world. We'll come back to verse 2 later but now let's sing verse **3** of the hymn #320.

"Before the hills in order stood, or earth received its frame, from everlasting you are God, to endless years the same."

The concept of time is a particularly human dilemma especially as we try to organize it. In an effort to learn something new in the new year I have set myself a goal of learning to use the calendar feature on my computer. It has turned out to be a challenge. A calendar is simply a page with lots of empty boxes. The purpose of a calendar is to put future events into each box thereby organizing the days of our lives. It is easy to get hooked on fiddling with your calendar on a computer. My computer insists on putting a “reminder” on each appointment I put in my calendar. Then it pops up in a screen to interrupt me to remind me of some event I have planned. It’s annoying and I can’t figure out how to turn it off. It’s like the computer calendar is running my life.

And the more events one puts into the boxes of a calendar the higher ones stress becomes. Theologian Ted Peters (of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary) suggests that we view time in two distinct ways. One way is to view time as an empty bucket into which we dump events (like the boxes in a calendar). Or is it better to understand time the other way around, that is, events themselves measure and give time meaning? For example, we say of a vacation, “We had the time of our life.” (Ted Peters, Lecture at Holden Village, Oct. ’99) The significant events of our lives give our lives meaning and purpose. We cherish long-term relationships that give our days meaning and our years joy.

The inorganic matter of the universe is unaware of the passage of time. The rocks do not care about the passage of time. And the animals live in the present, innocently oblivious to the passing of time, naively unaware of the inevitability of death. But we humans are time-sensitive.

One thing we know for sure and that is, time is running out for us. The calendar turns, events pass and relationships change. Humans know that we are finite, we know that we are bound by time. God is not bound. For us, the turning of the calendar into a new year is a big deal for it is a mark of our finitude, our mortality. But not for God. The Bible says, **“With the Lord, a thousand years are like one day.”** (II Peter 3:8) The generations rise and fall before the Lord. We are like the flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow. Let’s sing verses **4 & 5** of the hymn.

**“A thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening gone. Short as the watch that ends the night, before the rising sun.”**

“Time, like an ever-rolling stream, soon bears us all away. We fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.”

A thousand years are like one day for God. Yet God, the eternal one, chose to limit himself in time by becoming one like us in Jesus, for “**God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believed in him might not perish but have eternal life.**” (John 3:16). “**The word became flesh, and dwelt among us.**” (John 1:14)

We mark time from the coming of Jesus. He changed everything. Christmas comes just before New Years and appropriately so. For in Christmas we see the gift of God to the world. And in this gift of a savior, God makes all things new. The old has passed away, the new has come. In Jesus we have a new beginning. In Jesus we have new life. In Jesus we have new hope. Hope for today and hope for all our tomorrows. Only God can really do anything new and in Jesus he has done just that. God has made a new beginning with the world. It is a new beginning based on forgiveness and grace.

In Jesus we have hope for the future, that “our time” on this earth is not all there is to life. We catch a glimpse of this in the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is past but the significance of the resurrection for us still lies in the future. The resurrection of Jesus changed the way the future will play out. Professor Peters uses this illustration. “**There is a church in Piza, Italy, close to the famous Leaning Tower of Piza. That church is acoustically miraculous. A single note played in the baptistery there will reverberate for a full minute. Could it be that the event of the resurrection of Jesus is like the striking of a single note and that we are in the middle of the “event” of the resurrection like the reverberation of the one note? Did the resurrection of Jesus start a rippling through time that will build until the end of time and culminate in the general resurrection of the dead? We’ll have to wait and see what God will do.**” (Ibid, Ted Peters)

What we do know is that God has given the world the hope of eternal life in Jesus. The text says, “**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**” (John 1:5) The light of Jesus shines in our dark world today giving hope to millions. Christians live in that light. It is our joy and our duty to reflect that light to others. There is hope for our future and that gives Christians courage to live according to God’s will today. Our future is not based on money, prestige, position, or strength. Our future is based upon

God's power. We rest secure in the shadow of God's throne. Let's sing the **second** verse of the hymn.

"Under the shadow of your throne, your saints have dwelt secure. Sufficient is your arm alone, and our defense is sure."

The text says, "**We have seen his glory, glory as of the father's only son, full of grace and truth.**" (John 1:14) The glory of Christmas is the glory of Emmanuel, God with us. God is with us, giving us hope, sheltering us from evil, lighting our path, leading us home. Our times are in His hands. A new decade has begun. God is with us. "**We have beheld his glory, glory as of the father's only Son.**"

Let us sing the last verse together (vs. 6) giving thanks and praise to God for the gift of life, the gift of a new year, the gift of Jesus, and the promise of a future, secure in the hands of God.

"Oh God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, Still be our guard while troubles last and our eternal home."

Prayer: God of glory, all time is in your hands. You are our help in ages past and our hope for years to come. Give us faith to trust in your abundant provision as long as we live. In Jesus name we pray. AMEN

Let's sing the sermon hymn.....#55 "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice"