

Rev. Gregory Gibbons  
Lola Park Lutheran Church  
Redford, MI 48239

Psalm 31:15

MY TIMES ARE IN YOUR HANDS

INI

In less than five hours the year 2015 will be simply a memory. Do you remember when a year seemed like a really long time? It was when we were little children and events like our birthdays, Christmas and getting out of school seemed like forever. It doesn't seem that way anymore. When you get old, you have to take stress tests on treadmills. Every two minutes or so they turn up the speed and ask how long you think you can last. Life is getting more and more like that treadmill. It keeps speeding up and you really don't know how long you can last. Time flies.

The year 2015 has come and is just about to go. In many ways it did not differ from the other years that had preceded it. Children were born, people got married, people died, battles were fought, some people made money and some lost money, some found happiness, some found disaster. Some celebrities, athletes, politicians and other famous people died or were disgraced. New ones took their place. Yet if this world stands another 200 years or so, will anyone really remember most of what happened in this year?

I think that we can safely say that in this past year, the world gave evidence of what it has always been: a world of sin. We have not become that utopia that many dream of, a world where there is only peace and harmony among all people, a world where all will lay down their weapons and sing together in perfect harmony. No, we see the very opposite. Cities are filled with unrest. People don't trust the police. Greed and selfishness, jealousy and envy, injustice and cruelty and the love of pleasure have filled the hearts of men once again. Robberies and murders, rapes and adultery, lying, cheating and every kind of vice fill the airways, both on the news and in the world of entertainment. If we were to go out looking for evidence of man's sinfulness, we really wouldn't have to go very far to find it.

Even though sin has filled this world, we as God's people find comfort that God has been with us and has strengthened and upheld us with his Word and with his presence. There was never a single day when God had forsaken us and left us. And as he was with us in the past, he promises to be with us in the future as well. We say goodbye to 2015 and hello to 2016 knowing that we have nothing to fear. Even though time does fly very quickly, we can always say MY TIMES ARE IN YOUR HANDS!

People want to know the future. There are plenty of people who will go to fortunetellers, tarot readings, and spend lots of money trying to know what is coming. No one knows the future except God. I can tell you some of the things that are coming. We will have a new election for President. We will all get tired of commercials and phone calls telling us who is lying and who is telling the truth. The correct answer is "none of them." We will wonder why certain people are named celebrities because they obviously have no talent whatsoever. There will be some people getting richer and others getting poorer, but a lot of that will come from the way that these people use their money. Some will save it and some will throw it away. Many people will complain that life is unfair. Crime and war will continue to be around. Some people will find new jobs; others will lose theirs. Some will decry belief in God as the problem; others will see it as the solution.

There will be calamities and disasters. In various parts of the world there will be fires and floods, tornadoes and hurricanes, earthquakes and famines. Airplanes and trains will crash. Drunk drivers will end the lives of many. There will be car accidents and gun accidents and machine accidents. People will go to the doctor and come home with bad news. They or loved ones have a fatal disease and there is nothing that they can do about it. And people will lose

loved ones to death. Some will be expected as death comes to people who have lived long lives or not-so-healthy lifestyles. Others will be shocking because they came too young and too suddenly. We know that our hopes and dreams may already be dashed by January 2. And there is nothing that we can do to stop these things.

Well, that certainly was depressing! Shall we all go home now and wait to die? No, we have a totally different attitude. We say with the Psalmist: "My times are in your hands." We know that this world and its pleasures are not the be-all and end-all. We know that we are only strangers and pilgrims here on earth. Heaven is our true home, our permanent destination. We see that God is here to guide our lives and he has!

We know that we are all sinners. We have sinned against God and against our fellow man in times too numerous to count. We have sinned by doing the things that God does not want us to be doing. We have sinned by not doing the things that God does want us to be doing. We have sinned and know exactly what we did wrong. We have sinned and to this day are totally unaware of what we did wrong. We have sinned and our conscience is very troubled about it. We have sinned and our conscience is bothered in the least. We deserve God's wrath and punishment both here and eternally in hell.

But we know what we have just celebrated. God loved us with an everlasting love. He promised to send a Savior. We see the trappings of Christmas as the Son of God took on human flesh, becoming one of us in order to take our place. He would live the perfect life that we could not live and he would die the death that our sins deserved. Lent is not that far away this year. We will follow our Lord Jesus to the cross and we will see how much he loved us. He will lay down his life for us and then he will take it up again on the third day known as Easter. We are no longer children of wrath, but are children of God, forgiven of all sins and heirs of an eternal home.

God loved us so much that he planned our salvation in eternity. He sacrificed his own Son to bring us to him. If he has done this, why should we worry about anything? God does plan to bring us safely home. Now we don't know exactly when that is going to be. Some of us will live long earthly lives, getting to our seventies, eighties, nineties and even beyond. Others might be called to their heavenly home at a younger age. We must view every day as a blessing. We don't know how long we have here on earth, but we do know that God will be with us every step of the way. James was the first apostle to be martyred as he was beheaded by King Herod. His brother John died a natural death almost seventy years later. Why did James die so young? Why did John get so old? Was one a better witness for Christ than the other? Was one more faithful? God allowed it in his wisdom. We don't know why some people go to heaven sooner than others.

Going to heaven is what it is all about, isn't it? If God sent his Son into this world to bring us back to his family, then we must conclude that he wants us in heaven with him. Then everything that happens to us in this world will ultimately serve God's purpose in getting us there. St. Paul said to the Romans, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." We don't always know what God has in mind, but we must trust that all things will work for our good, even though our eyes and human reason may be telling us something else. And you can bet that Satan is telling us that same thing. We might lose our health, we might lose our job, we might lose our money or home. We might lose loved ones to death and have absolutely no answer. It isn't easy to fight through our tears and say, "Lord, I still trust you!" but we must.

My times are in your hands! We have no guarantees in life other than the fact that God loves us. The bad things of this world remind us that sin and death are our constant companions as long as we are in this world. We cannot make it on our own. We need God and we need him every day. We are weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care. We need to take our problems to the Lord in prayer. We need to admit our weakness. We need to admit that we are not strong enough. We need a Savior who is always there for us.

God gives us his Word and Sacrament for our benefit and strengthening. He warns us against sin, comforts us in times of trial and sorrow, strengthens us when we feel like we can't take another step and helps us endure every danger that threatens both body and soul. We are not fighting against human beings. This is a battle for our very souls. Our struggles are against Satan and his forces from hell who want our very souls. We walk in the valley of the shadow of death. Our Good Shepherd will lead us so that we are not afraid.

Isn't it a comfort to say that our times are in God's hands? If they were in our hands, we would wander off and get lost. We would fall prey to Satan's lies and deceptions. We would be led to eternal death and the destruction of our souls. With God at our side, we can confidently say: "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." God loves us. He guides us. We are secure in his care. Our times are in his hands. AMEN.