

*Into the hand of God.* A New Year's Day sermon preached on January 1, 2017 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder

Texts: PSALM 90  
JUDE VS 24,25

It is Christmas 1939.

King George VI is about to give his Christmas Day message.

In 1939, Great Britain faced the real possibility of actual invasion – something that had not happened for a 1,000 years.

Near the end of the King's message, he quoted lines from a 1908 poem by one Minnie Louise Hoskins who at the time was an American lecturer at the London School of Economics.

The poem had found a place in heart of the King's wife, Elizabeth.

They were words that caught the mood of the country in 1939,

And they are most appropriate words to hold onto as we begin what may be a very turbulent and uncertain year on the world political scene as the Tweeter President of the United States with the bad hair is inaugurated later this month

Hoskins lines quoted by the King:

*I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year*

*Give me a light that I may tread safely into the  
unknown.*

*And he replied, 'Go into the darkness and put your  
hand into the hand of God.*

*That shall be better than light and safer than the  
known way!*

This is not a simplistic call to be unconcerned about  
the future

Nor is it a call to all sweetness and light that will  
come when we trust in God.

Rather, it is a call to remember that whatever  
happens over the course of this year

*God will not abandon us*

*Being in God's hands remains a pretty good place to be.*

Certainly we are a long way in time and space from  
1939 Britain.

But these are shall we say interesting times in which  
we live.

Economically, more month than money is becoming  
the norm for a lot more people

Drug abuse and addictions, while maybe not  
epidemic are certainly more in the news than they  
were say 5 years ago.

On the international level, there is a growing  
tension between the U.S. and Russia

Toss into that the looming presence of President  
Donald 'the tweeter' Trump

And there is anxiety and uncertainty present.

It is easy to buy into the attitude of ‘creeping despair’ is it not?

I wonder though, can we just step away and say, “I don’t want to talk about that now.”

Literally standing “at the gate of the year” how then shall we as God’s people not just move into this new year,

But move forward in confidence and in hope.

And not in a self-righteous or triumphalist way that only makes us come off as religious flakes!

How shall we move forward?

- Confident that the Lord God is with us – no matter what
- In hope – resting on the tried and validated promises of God.

Psalm 90 – the subscription says ‘A prayer of Moses, the man of God’.

We cannot be certain that Moses actually prayed these words,

What IS clear is that this Psalm is written by an individual who has the wisdom of age behind him

He looks at the world and his place in a very different way than would a young person who often sees himself/herself as indestructible.

The writer of Psalm 90 knows all too well that he and every human being are mortal – those images of dust and grass!

It is I believe a Psalm *full of appreciation*.

*In the light of OUR frailty, there is and will remain God.*

Our situation is not finally defined therefore  
by dust and grass,  
But by the One who makes us,  
Who gives us place?  
Who establishes 'home' for us – GOD!

The concluding verses of the book of Jude are  
one of the better known benedictions said at the end  
of worship services

Taken together – Psalm 90, Jude 24, 25

What reminders, helps and hopes are evident for  
us?

*God does not change.*

That is the promise of the first two verses of Psalm  
90

**Lord, you have been our dwelling place<sup>[a]</sup>  
in all generations.**

**<sup>2</sup>Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.**

Created things have a beginning and an end.

Not so their creator

He exists forever

God does not grow older, his energy level does not  
wax or wane

God cannot change for the better, for He is already  
perfect

And being perfect, He cannot change for the worse  
**from everlasting to everlasting you are God.**

Consider the implications of this affirmation

We are told to trust God with nothing less than our lives and future – yes?

This would be a major stumbling block for many if as time went on, God became like a lot of people as they age – decrease in energy, forgetful, crabby and sometimes very difficult

But,

God never becomes less truthful

Or less merciful or less just or less good than he used to be

*The character of God is today and always will be exactly what it was in Bible times*

I wonder

Do we let that truth percolate into our hearts?

What a truth to hold to as we 'stand at the gate of the year.

*The changelessness of God*

*The unalterable truth of His words*

*The irrefutable evidence of His constant love toward us.*

And not just for a day, a week a month, or when God feels like it,

But for our lifetime and beyond.

Another reminder from these lessons as we are standing at the gate of the year.

*God loves us in a real and identifiable way.*

The life, teaching, preaching, healing, death and resurrection of God's Son, Jesus, is proof beyond any reasonable doubt that this is the case

We know this,

We have heard it more than once

I wonder though, why it is so hard for many of us to live as if we really believe it.

The actual physical distance between our ears and our heart is not great

I wonder therefore why it takes for many a lifetime for what we hear about God's love to travel to our hearts – our emotional centre and become an integral part of our everyday lives.

The promise in the Jude verses affirms the truth of the love of God now and when He returns

**Now to him who is able to keep you from falling...**

God is guarding us,

Keeping us

Protecting us,

Helping us not to stumble.

He loves and reassures us

...think for a moment in your own life,

How though it may be explainable through circumstances and coincidences

Yet, you just know it is God who has lifted you when you were low,

Supported you when you were weak

Will we still fall, faithful followers of the Risen Christ we profess to be – YEP!

But God is not some petulant,  
 Keeping a list and checking it twice to see if we  
 have been naughty or nice God  
 He is not a God who delights in our groveling.

In fact, scripture affirms that God does not  
 keep score of our sins or faults.

God is very aware of our humanity and human  
 weaknesses

The power of temptation

That is why he continues to invite us to come  
 to him,

To trust him

To lean on him

And the words from Jude look not just  
 to the now, but to the ultimate future

The words affirm that the faithful upon their own  
 deaths or Jesus' return

Will be escorted into the presence of God,

Without fault and with great joy.

Still another reminder from these lessons  
 Standing at the gate of the year and placing our  
 hand into the hand of God,

*New opportunities and possibilities await us*

I wonder why far too many of us continue to dwell  
 on our failures,

Our mistakes

The missed opportunities we passed up.

I wonder why so many of us unhealthily dwell on the past – the what were;'s, could have beens, should have beens, ought to have beens, might have beens

We mortgage the present and definitely the future owing to preoccupation with the past.

You all know that the greatest enemy of hope is nostalgia – YES!

The Psalmist in the 12<sup>th</sup> verse of Psalm 90 reminds us of a much more positive approach to living

**So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart**

Personally I prefer the KJV version – meatier and no nonsense

**So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.**

Here, the Psalmist is not referring to acquisition of more facts

Wise heart or hearts unto wisdom refers to the ability to take into account the whole of life

The Psalmist does not elaborate here in the Psalm as to how this is to take place – the prayer is only for God to teach!

However, based on what runs through scripture, I cannot help but see this “teach us” including such things as –practicing both receiving and offering forgiveness



There may be a person toward whom you have  
 harboured ill will and resentment for far too long  
 Perhaps many times you have even said to yourself,  
 “Someday I will go to that person,  
 Will try to make things right  
 Forgive or ask for forgiveness

Why not make that “someday” sometime  
 early in the New Year?

For an unforgiving spirit and attitude will most  
 assuredly eat away at you and compromise your  
 faith in the risen Christ.

Begin with an awareness of God’s forgiveness  
 of you.

Teach us also I believe includes being  
 conscientiously thankful for what you have,  
 Rather than grouching about what you don’t have.  
 It is not easy to cultivate a thankful attitude—  
 especially for those of us who are quick to zero in  
 on the what’s wrong with this picture.

However, a grateful heart is an important  
 component of cultivating that wise heart about  
 which Psalm 90 speaks

The old Talmudic saying is spot on—*in the life to  
 come, God will call us to account for all the good things  
 on this earth and in this life that we failed to enjoy.*

Standing at the gate of the year, this  
 morning’s readings remind us that:

- ✓ God does not change
- ✓ God's love is up close, personal and very real
- ✓ We are always given new opportunities and new challenges to draw closer to God – to gain as the Psalmist calls it, a wise heart

May each of us then be given by God,

Eyes to see,

Ears to hear

And hearts to understand throughout this year,

--how great is God's love and care,

Mercy and forgiveness,

Grace and lavish generosity toward each and every one of us. AMEN