In 1 Corinthians 12:4 the Apostle Paul writes: **There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.** In order that the members of his body, the church, may function as a unit, the Lord Jesus makes all of us managers of different kinds of gifts so that pooling our resources, we may work together to serve him and his kingdom.

But there is one blessing that God gives to all of us in the exact same quantity - that blessing is time. With the exception of the newborns among us, we were all put in charge of 8,760 hours again this year. When the clock strikes midnight in a few hours, we will all have withdrawn from the bank of time the same 525,600 minutes. We will all have spent the same 31,536,000 seconds.

All this time has come to us as a gift from God. But like all the other gifts we receive from him, time is something that God loans to us. We are only managers of this gift. We do not own time. God does. So on this New Year’s Eve, it is very fitting that we should join King David in saying: **MY TIMES ARE IN YOUR HANDS, O LORD.** So to you I confess my sins; and in you I put my trust.

Since our times are in the Lord's hands, we are accountable to him, not just for the way we use our time, but also for the way we think about time. The Lord says: **You shall have no other gods**, but just think how often we make time our god, worshiping it as if it owned us. We let deadlines and schedules dictate our moods. We live for vacations and holidays, expecting that time away from work will cure all that is wrong with us. We convince ourselves that if we could just learn to make better use of our time, there would be no end to the happiness we could experience here on earth. In all these ways and many more we look to time to do for us what only God can do. And what is the result? Wouldn't many of us say with King David: **Yes, my life is consumed by grief, and my years by groaning?**

Worship it as we may, time cannot live up to our expectations. Time off at Christmas and New Year's does not prove to be the stress reliever we thought it would be, so we head back to work or school more disappointed and depressed than ever.

Why does time treat us so cruelly? Well, first of all, let's realize that just as time is not a god to be worshiped neither is it a monster to be dreaded. As we said, time is a gift from our loving Creator. God made time to serve us. But our sin spoils time as it does the rest of God's creation. As is the case with all his other good gifts, we sinners abuse time. For example we spend time worrying because we do not trust God to take care of us. We steal time from our employers by slacking off on the job. We take time to gossip and curse. We waste time in sinful fantasies. You name the sin and we find the time to commit it, day after day, year after year. And then we have the nerve to think of time as our enemy, blaming it for aging us and draining us of strength, while all along, the real culprit is our sin.

God caused King David to realize this. David too had abused God's gift of time. He had taken some of the time God gave him and spent it lusting after his neighbor's wife. When that sin spun out of control, threatening to ruin his life, David found more time to plot and plan his neighbor's death. He thought he had gotten away with his sin, but in time he became completely miserable. And yet try as he might, he could not blame time for his troubles. In the end he had to confess: **My strength fails because of my guilt, and my bones grow weak.**

Time posed no threat to perfect Adam and Eve. It was only after they sinned that
the passing of time brought aging and death to them and all of us. So tonight, as we mark the passing of another year, a year which has taken its toll on all of us in any number of ways, like David before us, it is right for us to make the connection between our sin and the pain that it brings to us and others. That is not to say that we must always look for or find some specific piece of suffering in our life for each and every sin committed. But we will acknowledge that sin in general causes all suffering in life. And so it is right for each of us to bring our many sins to God and say to him: My times are in your hands, O Lord, to you I confess my sins, including my misuse and abuse of your gift of time. I have been selfish with time. I have squandered it, giving too little of it back to you in the form of praise and service. I deserve to suffer your punishment here in time and forever in hell.

What else can we say to God? Can you think of some offer we sinners might make to him, that would cause him to withhold the punishment we have coming to us? Can we promise him that we will never misuse his gifts again? And even if we could keep such an impossible promise from this day on, should we expect that to be enough to satisfy God who demands a lifetime of perfection from us and who insists that every sin be paid for? No, there is nothing we can do to right even one of our wrongs, let alone all of them. From the moment sin entered into the world, all hope in our own efforts to gain heaven was lost. All hope now must be focused on God, the same God against whom we sin every day. There is nothing to do but to beg for his mercy and plead for his forgiveness.

I suppose that might sound like a waste of time. But King David did not think so. Having acknowledged the guilt of his sin, he says in all confidence with his very next breath: But I – I trust in you, O Lord. I say, You are my God. My times are in your hand. David’s hope was not in himself, but in the God of all grace who had made a promise to show David love, not because David deserved it, but because God’s love. The same God made the same promise to all of us at the time of our baptism. His promise is not conditional. It is not dependent on our ability to earn God’s love. It is founded on Jesus and what he did with time as our substitute.

At the beginning of time, only moments after our first parents ruined themselves and all of us with their sin, God promised to send a Savior to rescue them and us. St Paul records how God kept this promise, writing in Galatians 4:4-5: But when the set time had fully come, God sent his son to be born of a woman, so that he would be born under the law, in order to redeem those under the law, so that we would be adopted as sons.

Jesus, our eternal God, stepped into time and used it to save us from sin. He spent his 33 years on earth living a perfect life that God is willing to accept as a replacement for our lifetime of sin. And then at the end of his 33 years, Jesus spent six God-forsaken hours on the cross, suffering in our place the full punishment for sin that we would have had to endure throughout all eternity. But not anymore, this punishment no longer awaits us because just three days after he died, God raised Jesus from the dead to prove that his sin-payment has been credited to our account. Think of it! God used 33 years, 6 hours, and 3 days to save us from an eternity of misery! Such mercy invites each of us to say: My times are in your hand, O Lord. In you I put my trust - my trust for forgiveness and my trust for deliverance.

You see my friends, with our trust placed in God and his great love for us, we can enter the New Year, praying to our Lord as David does here in our psalm: Deliver me
from the hand of my enemies and from those who pursue me. Having rescued us from our greatest enemies - sin, death, and Sat - we can count on Jesus to protect us every day from everything that might threaten our relationship with him. This does not mean that Satan will give up on his efforts to destroy us. It does not mean that all the world's terrorists will suddenly disappear. But it does mean that our dear Jesus will watch over us in such a way that he will either keep us from evil or make evil serve our good. Either way we can depend on him to deliver us from our enemy, whether that enemy has flesh and blood or he is the devil himself.

We can even count on Jesus to help us battle the enemy inside of us, our own sinful nature. This enemy looks ahead and sees a whole new year of hours to spend committing every sin imaginable. But our sinful nature need not get his way. You and I have other plans for the year ahead. We want to dedicate every day as a thank you to Jesus who gave all his days for us. To this end, we will make plans right now to begin every week by spending a couple of hours in God's house for worship and Bible study. We can plan to spend a few precious moments every other week communing with our Savior in his Holy Supper, receiving the very body and blood with which he purchased our forgiveness and salvation. We can plan right now to set aside 15 minutes or so each day to pray and meditate on God's Word so that we may live out the remainder of the day in the peace and with the strength that only God can give. There is so much we can do to serve our God in the year ahead as we spend time loving the family he has given us and serving the people he has placed around us.

But to carry this all out we must have the Lord's blessing or all our plans will come to nothing. So in the closing words of our text we pray, Lord, let your face shine on your servant. Help me live each day for you, and if I fail you, as I have so often in the past, please, Lord, save me in your mercy for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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