

We are God's, that is, we belong to God. We are *not* gods. In other words, I am not a god, and you aren't either. On this All Saints' Day, we are going to be unraveling this theme through four images all of which circle around our responsive psalm, also called the introit, namely, Psalm 31.

The central verse of Psalm 31 is verse 5: **“Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.”** Our first image is a pastor counseling a family in the wake of losing their mom to COVID.

The pastor said, “I know it is a painful thing to lose Ruby, your mom. You wish you could spend the last hours with her instead of being locked away in an intensive care unit. You miss *your* mom. But in these upcoming weeks and months, it's important to realize that she was never truly lost.”

The pastor continued, “She was and is the Lord's. She belongs to Jesus. She is in His tender care right now in heaven, completely healed from COVID and no longer suffering. Sometimes we can be so possessive. We think Ruby is ours. To a certain extent that is true. But ultimately, the Father created her. The Son redeemed her. The Holy Spirit sanctified her. She belongs to God, and she is in His tender care.” And so, it could be said of Ruby, **“Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.”**

Our second image comes from a book I recently read, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* by Rosaria Butterfield. Rosaria details her troubled childhood and her strained relationship with her mother. When Rosaria became a Christian, this relationship only became more tense.

Her mother was an avowed atheist, and when mom lived with the Butterfields in her last years of life, she mocked their family devotions, faith, and churchgoing. However, when Rosaria's mom was diagnosed with terminal cancer, a door was opened for the sharing of the gospel.

Near the beginning of her mom's hospice care she said, “Rosaria, I read your books. If anything would have made me a Christian, they would, but I am not weak, like you.”

Despite her mom's attitude, Rosaria stayed at her mom's bedside for what would be the last eight days of her life: knitting, praying, and singing the psalter. The hospice nurses wanted to have the door open so other patients could hear Rosaria sing. Unbelieving nurses even volunteered to sing along with her!

Days of praying and singing, adjusting pillows and swabbing lips with water. Her mom remarked, “I'm dying. I'm becoming weak, not strong, how is my soul being made strong?”

To which Rosaria replied, “Mom, your soul bears God's image and it will last forever, even as your body wastes away.”

Gospel conversations like this continued as her mom continued to die. Until two days before her death she said, “Well that settles it then, I am now weak, I am

weak like you, I do need the shepherd, now what?" After further conversation, Rosaria's mother, a previously devoted unbeliever, received Christ as her savior. Some of her last words as she drifted in and out of consciousness were, "Why is this taking so long? I'm ready to have my robe of righteousness!"

Rosaria concludes the chapter writing on death, "If you are in Christ, your soul strengthens and during this process which would be frightening beyond belief without the Lord. God promises to be the stability of your times."

This story is an illustration of Psalm 31:5. "**Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.**" Rosaria walked alongside her dying mother and showed her that in her weakness, she could find her strength in Christ. He could be *her* shepherd.

As we look at all of Psalm 31, not just the parts we read responsively, we see David's struggles. He laments, "**Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.**" His enemies are a constant threat and taunt to him.

Yet throughout this Psalm, we see how David takes refuge in the Lord. He says this four times most notably in verse 1, "**In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me!**"

And so we see this refuge imagery in so many ways in Scripture. Last week we sung "A Mighty Fortress is our God." God is our fortress. In our reading from Revelation, we see Christians sheltered in the very presence of God and covered in those white robes of righteousness.

Paul writes in Colossians 3:3–4 "**For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**" Christ is our hiding place, our refuge and strength. In Baptism, you have been hidden in Christ.

In her lifetime, Rosaria's mom thought she was strong. By many worldly standards, she was. She thought she was her own god. But it took terminal cancer to realize the truth, that she is God's. Her spirit was committed into God's care because He had redeemed her, and she believed that.

We Christians secretly want to be our own gods, but in reality, we belong to God. When Rosaria's mom insulted her calling her weak, Rosaria comforted herself reciting 2 Corinthians 12:10, "**For when I am weak, then I am strong.**" It may take a dying loved one, or it may take our own death bed, but it doesn't need to take a calamity to pray Psalm 31:5 fervently, "**Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.**" We belong to God.

What this means on this All Saints' Day is that we have something in common with our departed loved ones: we are God's. That is, we all belong to God

and are in His loving care. The veil between life and death is a thin one, and those Saints in Christ are not too far off.

We celebrate today because whether it be a Christian who had a dramatic deathbed conversion or was a faithful believer from infancy, we are in Jesus' tender care. We may not see it now, but it will be made all the clearer as what we read of in Scripture becomes sight. Our spirits are in the hands of the Good Shepherd, on good days and bad.

Our third image takes us to the cross. **“Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last.”** On this All Saints' Day we take heart because as we mourn the loss of loved ones, or we face death ourselves, we know that Jesus who is himself God, is at the same time God's. Jesus knew that He belonged to the Father.

Trust Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Who came to lead you from death to life. No sin is too great because He came to forgive sinners and His blood atones for all your pride, treason, and delusions that you are sufficient in and of yourself. In His trials, in His tribulations, even in death, He knew that He belonged to His Heavenly Father, and He committed His spirit into the Lord's hands.

If Jesus tasted death before He burst from the grave, so too we can trust when we see Christians enter death, knowing they are not truly gone, but are in Jesus' tender care awaiting the resurrection. Souls entrusted to Jesus' care are never lost.

One last image as we close out our sermon. As I gathered at pastors' conference last month, a dozen or so of us gathered in the conference room to pray the bedtime prayer order called compline. You can also pray it at home with your family.

We sung Psalm 31:5 as part of that order of service: **“Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.”** Every day, before we go to bed, the Word of God which is on our lips, tongues, and mouths reminds us that our lives are in God's hands.

Each night we go to bed, either having had the best day of our lives, or the worst, or something in the between. In the day prior either having held our newborn child in the hospital for the first time, or holding mom's hand for the last time, we, with all the saints, entrust our lives to God, knowing that we are His.

The Father has created us. The Son has redeemed us and forgiven all our sins. The Holy Spirit has marked us by baptism and made us Saints. And so whether it's at compline or at our last breath, we can say, **“Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.”** We belong to God. We are truly God's—whether we live or die. Amen!