

TAKE MY HAND

Sunday, June 18, 2023

Rev. Jimmie Scott

Precious Lord, Take My Hand – Lyrics

*Precious Lord, take my hand
Lead me on, let me stand
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn
Through the storm, through the night
Lead me on through the light
Take my hand, precious Lord
And lead me home*

*When my way grows dreary
Precious Lord, lead me near
When my life is almost gone
At the river I will stand
Guide my feet, hold my hand
Take my hand, precious Lord
And lead me home*

*Precious Lord, take my hand
Lead me on, let me stand
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn
Through the storm, through the night
Lead me on through the light
Take my hand, precious Lord
And lead me home*

So, it wouldn't be appropriate on Father's Day if I didn't fill in for Richard appropriately by telling a few bad Dad jokes.

So what did the dad spider say to the baby spider? You spend too much time on the web. [Congregation laughs]

So what is a guitar player's favorite food? Strum-bolie. [Congregation groans and laughs]

[Laughs] They don't get any better! [Congregation laughs]

Have you heard about the restaurant on the moon? It has great food, but no atmosphere. [Congregation groans and laughs]

Oh, God. Help me! [Congregation laughs]

Okay. So take my hand. This is a special song for me. The hand in the Scripture is the most frequently symbolized part of the human body. There's a number of places in Scripture where the hand is represented. And in one instance it can represent strength and, in another instance, it can represent power. In another instance, it can represent protection, as well as generosity or hospitality. And in another instance, it can represent stability. And just the act of shaking hands symbolizes both greeting and friendship.

And in the Scriptures, the right hand signifies bravery; it signifies power; it signifies virality. The right hand is seen as a place of honor and status. And through the Biblical text you can find instances where different prophets and teachers spoke of the right hand and the place of honor and status that it represents throughout the Bible's journey.

One in particular speaks of Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father, which is an affirmation that he has the same status as God.

And so this morning, I want to talk about a piece of Scripture that has meant a lot to me on my journey, and I'll speak some to that a little later. And one of the profoundest, I think, Biblical recordings is found in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus feeds the multitudes with the five loaves and the two fishes. and it's located in Matthew 14:21. And it states that there were 5,000 plus women and children ... an astronomical number when we think about that in those times. Five thousand men plus women and children!

But following that extraordinary event was another event that's equally amazing. He's fed 5,000 men and women and children with five loaves and two fishes. And then we move on to Matthew 14:22, where it says:

"When he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain."

He went up to a higher place in his consciousness.

"And when evening was done, he was by himself and alone. But by now the disciples were in a boat, and they were in the midst of the sea. And the boat was being tossed by waves and the wind was contrary."

"And on the 4th Watch of the night ..."

... Which is about 3 o'clock in the morning ...

"... Jesus went to the disciples walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw this, they were afraid, thinking it was a ghost or something. So they cried out in fear."

And the Scripture says:

"He spoke to them, saying 'It is I; do not be afraid.'"

And then the Scripture says:

"Peter answered him and said, 'Lord, if it is you, let me come to you on the water ...'"

So at this point in the story, we have to imagine that these disciples had had an amazing day. They had witnessed an absolutely incredibly small amount of food feed over 5,000 people. They had seen the impossible become a reality. And they want more miracles! They want more proof; more success; more things to make them believe that God is on their side.

And as the story goes, Jesus stretches forth his hand to Peter and simply says:

"Take my hand."

And Peter stepped out of the boat and on to -- or into -- the water. But when he saw the power of the winds and the power of the waves, he began to become afraid, and he sank. He was crying out, *"Lord, save me."*

"And so, again, Jesus stretches forth his hand and he caught him, saying to him, 'Oh ye of little faith; why did you doubt?'"

So this is a lot of spiritual meat here, just in this beginning. *"Take my hand."* Take my hand: just three little words.

I just want to fast forward a few hundred years in the evolution of humanity, where I invite you to think about the power of faith in your life. The evolution of our lives. Think about the power that faith has created in each of our lives, individually and collectively, to bring us to this point where we are in humanity. Think about the obstacles that you've had to overcome in your personal life. Think about the times of doubt that could have possibly made you feel hopeless and/or helpless.

And then I want to invite you to think about the seemingly impossible series of unexplained and unexpected set of events where the hand of God literally reaches out to save you. And it doesn't have to be a hand; it can be good luck or what we call good fortune. Or it could be divine timing, as we often use the term in Unity ... Whatever you call out to in those times when life is starting to give you trouble. Divine timing is a complicated thing.

So the reason I chose this song this morning -- "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" -- is because, as a young boy, I was made to go to church by my family. It was something that you had to do. And the thing that I enjoyed most about the church services was the singing of the lady in the church by the name Miss Bertha Hancock who, when she sang that song, it literally felt as if it was lifting that small church off of the foundation and into the heavens. And it was in those times that I actually felt comfortable in my skin, and felt comfortable enough to begin to trust in what I was hearing the preachers talk about as God being in our lives.

And then, as I grew older and I began to see what I perceived to be much of the hypocrisy that took place in the church, I became disenchanted with it. And I decided to leave ... And I've told this story numerous times. I went to my mother and I said I was never going to church again a day in my life, and she wasn't going to make me. And after recovering the circumstances for challenging my mother in such a way [congregation laughs], I didn't.

And it created a void in my life. I began a path of self-destruction that had led me down a number of paths that were not good for me. And I really began to doubt whether or not life was worth living.

And I stayed on that path for quite a number of years, probably 16 to about 30. And there was one point in that journey where I had drunk 12 pints of cheap wine by myself and had passed out and was laying under the rear wheels of an automobile. And the only thing I remember about that was the fact that someone had called my father, and he had come to pick me up and put me on his shoulders and carried me home.

And we never ever discussed that. And the thing that was chilling to me was the impact it had on my consciousness. Because from that point, until I was in my late 30s, much of my life was a complete hell, even though I was constantly working and challenging myself to become a better person.

And so this song has followed through that journey. And in my times of deepest trouble, it's been my place of refuge.

So today, on Father's Day, I want to acknowledge my dad for literally saving my life; for giving the freedom to find myself; and then giving me the support to never mention it again. I don't think he ever mentioned it in my entire life. So I'm appreciative of that today in one regard ... and then in another, I wish we'd had the opportunity to talk about that and to explore my journey and his journey, as well, to see where we both arrived in the later years of our lives.

Life is a challenge. It's always got some surprises for us. And in those moments, we have to be able to stand strong; stand up to those challenges; and remember that we've got all the resources we need within us to deal with anything that comes our way. And we have to do that every day of our lives.

I want to tell you a little story It's about a young couple who planned to get married but, before they could get married, they were involved in a tragic automobile accident. And it was fatal. So they've arrived, and they're standing at the gate of heaven. And they look up and they see St. Peter. And they ask St. Peter if they could just get married in heaven.

And so St. Pete says to them, *"I'm not sure about that."* He said, *"I've never had that kind of request before, but let me go into heaven and check it out with God, and then I'll get right back with you."*

And so the couple sat and they sat in faith. And for about two months, they sat waiting. And then they started to doubt. They began to doubt whether they should even be there at heaven's door. So, in their doubt, they got together; they had a discussion. They decided to stick it out a little longer.

And another month goes by, and finally St. Peter emerges from heaven. And he's tired and he's bedraggled. And he says to them, *"Yes! You can get married in heaven."* And then the couple thinks about it for a few moments. And then they say, *"Well, what if it doesn't work out? Can we then get divorce?"*

And by this time, St. Peter is red in the face and is completely annoyed. And so he slams his clipboard and he says, *"Geeez!"* And the couple are shocked and scared, and they said, *"What's wrong?"*

And St. Peter says, *"Listen! It took me three months to find a priest up here."* [Congregation laughs] *He says, "Do you have any idea how long it will take to find you a lawyer?"* [Congregation laughs]

So this is about an act of faith. And an act of faith comes to us every day. Sometimes just a very simple act of getting out of bed in the morning is an act of faith. And I've been doing this so-called spiritual work for a long time in my life. I've seen quite a few tragedies and I'm sure most of us have, in one way or another, have seen a few and possibly had a few in our lives. But one thing that's helped me immensely in my times of distress and struggle has been music. And it's been all kinds of music: it's been jazz music; it's been pop music; it's been blues music; it's been rock music; it's been reggae music; it's been spiritual music; it's been country music. And they are all capable of inspiring me.

And the two songs that I chose for this morning's message ["Precious Lord, Take My Hand" and "It's Probably Me"], they kind of speak to the complicated rhythm of my own personal spiritual journey and of my soul's journey. Jesus' message to Peter is a message to you and to me. It's a message for everyone in the world who is willing to receive it. And the message is not about religion or dogma or creeds. It's about trusting. And it's about believing. It's about having faith. It's about taking a risk. It's about asking for help. It's about meeting the challenges of life. It's about meeting them halfway, no matter how difficult they seem or how much they challenge us.

And so we all struggle. We struggle sometimes with issues of self-esteem. We struggle with worrying about the future. Sometimes we get angry at the systemic issues that we see in this complicated culture that we live in. We get confused about our personal relationships from time to time. And we get confused our relationship with God. Sometimes it's difficult for us to be able to sort through all the intricacies of that relationship.

I don't, as I said, remember much about that experience when I was 16 other than the fact that it literally shaped the way I lived my life for the next 70-some years. And Miss Bertha Hancock's rendition of "Precious Lord" is my mantra, if you will:

*"Precious Lord, take my hand
Lead me on, let me stand ...
Take my hand, precious Lord,
And lead me home."*

So it's been said that moments come and moments go, but memories last for a lifetime. And there is no healing without understanding that our memories have value. And we all want to be healed in life, because healing is a large part of what makes us whole. Or, to use a Scriptural term, it's a large part of our holiness.

And so this great song, "Precious Lord," was written by Tommy Dorsey. He wrote "Precious Lord" in August 1932 after his life was thrown into a crisis when his wife and his son died during childbirth. And he often said the song, "Precious Lord," came directly to him from God. Put another way, he was simply an instrument through which God spoke to the world.

Many great singers throughout the years have sung this song. It's a powerful song! They're all instruments; we're all instruments. We're all the hands of God! And the sooner we begin to understand that, the sooner we'll be able to get our world and our planet back on track.

Faith is a byproduct of practiced belief. You have to believe over and over and over again, until we can actually feel like we own whatever is taking place in our lives. And when Jesus told Peter to take his hand, he was offering his transference of that spiritual power that he possessed. It was, in a sense, reminding Peter to remember his role in shifting and saving the planet. He fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes.

I read an article in the magazine, *Psychology Today*, that said every human being should take five or 10 minutes a day remembering their successes; remembering everything you felt good about -- or feel good about -- doing in your life. Every day!

And then the article goes a step further and says you have to remember the people in your life who have supported you. How frequently do we do that? How frequently do we remember the people who support us? How frequently do we remember the people who believe in us? People who boosted our confidence? People who have had a calming effect on our spirit? How frequently do we remember them?

And then they said another thing we could do is to do good things for others. And it could be something as small as holding the door for a stranger, or simply expressing gratitude to a co-worker or a friend. Or doing a favor for an acquaintance. Or thanking your barista, something I did this morning. Do some volunteering in your community.

This is a biggie! It says every human being should take some time to forgive themselves. Let me repeat that. Forgive yourself! Because it's impossible for us to meet every demand in our lives. It's impossible for us to do every task that is front of us. It's impossible for us to be perfect. It's impossible for us to never make a mistake. So it's important for us to learn how to forgive ourselves. And Jesus' journey was about that.

Another thing it said is: Don't shy away from a challenge. It says at least once a week or once every other week, do something that takes you out of your comfort zone. Another thing it says is: Find behavior patterns that you need to change, and then understand that you can't change them overnight. That you have to continually act in ways that will make you understand how you can do better and be better and feel better about yourself and your life and your goals.

Carl Jung said, "*Our goals are only important as ideas ... the essential thing is the opus.*" In other words, the essential thing is the work that leads to the goals. And that is the one goal that we have to be cognizant about every day in our lives. The work: That's what we're here to do. And it's sometimes challenging! Stuff happens; we have failures; we make mistakes; we have unexpected events. But still we have to do the work.

In Tommy Dorsey's life, he wrote 3,000 songs; a third of them were gospel. He died November 26, 1956, at his home in Connecticut. It was one week after his 51st birthday. He had choked to death in his sleep after a large meal. But in reality, he lives on through his music, through his work.

Our work in life is to displace the obstacles to success, however we define success. **"Take my hand."** It's good work if you're willing to commit to doing it!

I'll leave you with this quote. It's from Martin Luther. He said, and I quote:

"I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."

God bless!

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