

**In Our Hands**  
**Matthew 10:24-39**  
**Rev. Steve McCoy**  
**June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008**  
**First United Methodist Church**  
**Marquette, MI**

I learned like many of us here the song in Sunday School “he’s got the whole world n his hands...” and the song went on. Then we went on to describe the world the things in the world and even us in his hands. Now on the biggest level this is true of course. We do believe this on the larger cosmological scale. Yet today we are reminded that God has given it to us. Some things we can control others we can’t but God has given things over to our hands. Casey Stengel, former baseball manager of the New York Yankees made this comment about the game. He guaranteed that you will win one third of your games and you will lose one third of your games. The other third, that’s up to you.

Essentially in baseball as in life bad things are going to happen and there is nothing you can do about it. Good things are going to happen and there is nothing you can do about it. But there are also going to be things that happen that there is something you can do about. The question for us is will we take these matters into our hands or will we leave them to chance.

Jesus keeps right on going after he sends out his disciples and gives them a directive. You must go out and do the things you are called to do. We cannot be afraid for what do we have to fear? Paul puts it another way that if God is for us, who can be against us.

Someone asked me the other day if it was scary getting up here on Sunday having to talk in front of people every week. I hadn’t really thought about it in a long while as a matter of fact. But I concluded to her, no it is not scary. It is what I do. It is what my calling from God is all about. That doesn’t mean it is not difficult at times. There are texts that are particularly hard to preach on, this one included. Usually it’s because it makes me, makes us uncomfortable, challenges our notions of right and wrong, or calls me to proclaim a message that runs counter to our cultural thinking. No matter how many times we have heard it before, God is always prodding us to be a more faithful disciple. But that can be a difficult task. However, if we are proclaiming the truth of God, then we should not fear what it is that we are called to do and be. God cares for us more than anything. But we must take these tasks into our hands because it is God who has placed them there.

If Jesus was trying to move his first century listeners away from placing the authority of the clan above all else, he is calling us, his 20th-century audience, to loosen our grip on that which routinely claims our highest allegiance - ourselves.

We believe that our identity lies in our uniqueness, our independence, our separateness. A million little quirky, unrepeatable nuances make us who we are,

and make us like nobody else. Our pride in our one-of-a-kind-ness makes Jesus' command all the more repugnant.

Our self-involved, self-worshiping, self-aggrandizing ego provides the perfect acronym for this attitude: Edging God Out. Such a "perfectly" re-created being as we believe ourselves to be surely has no need of God - especially a God whose power and glory might make us look bad. But this ego-attitude, this self-congratulatory self-absorption, is exactly what Jesus asks us to lose. The self-denial Jesus wants us to make is not self-degradation (for that too is a form of individually-fixed selfishness). True self-denial gives up pride in our separate, unique identity and instead recognizes how remarkably similar we are to every other member of the human race.

Like every other human being, we have sinned and fallen short of the glory God intends for us. Only in making this confession can we find the transformed life that Jesus offers us.

"To one's own self be true" has become the mantra of our self-obsessed culture. Jesus' call stands in radical discontinuity to this conventional wisdom for he declares: "To one's own self be not true." Instead, Jesus challenges us to be true to God, not self, in order to find our true self.<sup>1</sup>

Today's first world mainline culture has sometimes caused us to be afraid. We relegate religion to the private life. Making it a personal decision that we add on to the rest of our lives. God calls us to a different standard. However, we should not fear being evangelical, we should not fear using what God gives us to do. Why because there really is no reason to be afraid. For too long we have allowed Christianity to become commercialized, and dramatized. We have let the "Evangelicals" define in the media what the word means. However, the term evangelism simply means to bring good news. I got polled this week in regard to this fall's election. There were a series of questions that asked about my religious life. They asked whether I was a protestant or a catholic and I said: "yes". That threw the pollster. Then I was asked if I or anyone in my household was an evangelical Christian. I was tempted to use the answer that they give at the Simple Way church in Philadelphia. Which is if you mean by evangelical that we try to bring the good news to the poor, bring release to the captives, give sight to the blind, feeding the hungry and curing the sick, then yes. In the end I said I am but not the way you would define it. That threw them as well.

Jesus reminds us here that we are not to be put into categories, and if others do it says more about them than it does about us. We are called to be faithful, we are called to be, servants we are called to share the good news. The only one we should be impressing is God. And the good news is that God is already impressed.

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<sup>1</sup> *Higher Allegiances* Homiletics online. June 1993.