

## Wendy's May Prayer Thoughts

Having had my right hand in a cast for 7 weeks, except for fingers and thumb, I realised how it is an essential part of our anatomy, so needed to carry out daily tasks. The hand is a miracle of engineering enabling dexterity, grasping and precision gripping. An analysis of the structure of the hand reveals 27 bones, blood vessels and ligaments. 7 muscles control the index finger. I glanced at the small porcelain replica of Durer's "Praying Hands," which was gifted to me by my mother, but it is nowhere as detailed as the original sketch of 1508 commissioned for a triptych by Jacob Heller. The masterpiece was to be placed behind the altar in a new Church in Frankfurt celebrating the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin Mary. In 1729 it was completely destroyed by fire. Fortunately the painting had been copied by another artist in 1614, so all was not lost. The hands had been sketched for an apostle who was kneeling at Mary's feet...

The famous sketch can be viewed in the Albertina Museum in Vienna. It was drawn in white ink with streaks of grey on blue paper. Looking at the hands they are obviously those of a working person, misshapen and stiff. Whose were they? Were they Durer's own? He painted several self portraits, the first by looking through a mirror when he was 15 years old. There have been several legends about the composition, but one written down by J. Greenwood in 1933 seems to dispel anonymity. It tells how in a tiny village in Nuremberg Albrecht senior a goldsmith worked all hours to provide for his 8 children. Two of them longed to be artists, but they knew it would be impossible for their father to send them to study for 4 years at the Academy. Not to be daunted they hatched a plan. The tossing of a coin would indicate which one should go first, while the other waited and went to work in the mines. Albrecht the younger was to go first. Whilst studying he was to accumulate money by selling his art work for the accumulation of his brother's fees. This was not to be, for when Albrecht had finished his studies his brother tearfully told him that working in the mines had ruined his hands. He would not be able to hold pen or brush because his fingers had been broken and arthritis had set in. Albrecht sketched those hands, their palms together and fingers pointing upwards. Albrecht Durer was a staunch Christian, and I cannot help but think that those hands were raised to God...

There are many references in Scripture for God using His right hand to remind us of His presence with us, and the difference that makes as we maintain our relationship with Him; a relationship which is cemented through Christ and through devoting ourselves to prayer as Paul exhorts us in his writing to the Christians in Colossae.....

.....“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.” We bow before a holy God who knows when our heart is not “pure.” as the writer of psalm 73 tells us. He needed to boldly confess his foolish thoughts and ways. “When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was stupid and ignorant; I was like a brute beast before you.

Nevertheless I am continually with you; you held my right hand.” vs.21-23. God is good and merciful. Despite our foolish thoughts and utterances God grips us by the right hand and pulls us close to Him, rather than abandon us.

He restrains us to protect us. John Calvin commented, “The force of the metaphor, which represents God as holding us by the right hand, is to be particularly noticed, for there is no temptation, let it be ever so slight, which would easily overthrow us, were we not upheld and sustained by the power of God.”

Asp reminds us that God is fully aware of our state when we come to speak with Him. Let us pour out our hearts to Him that it may be well with our souls. Thank the Holy Spirit for working within us, reminding us that faith/trust does not depend on our fragile hold on God, but on God's powerful hand keeping and strengthening us. .

David as Asaph was equally confident of God's hand on his life. Both were confident of his never failing presence sustaining them, wherever they were and in whatever they were facing. David marvelled while questioning, “Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I go from your presence?” Psalm 139:7. He knew that God was transcendent, yet it was also all pervading. No one could go beyond it “If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.” v8--10. God's hand offered David guidance, and He offers it to us through the Holy Spirit within. God's right hand never lets him go, thus assuring him of security.

When we pray, let us thank God for His constant all embracing presence. Let us pledge to take time during the day to acknowledge it again, and ask for courage to live as God directs.