

Sun., March 21: [Pre-recorded and In-person]

Lenten Series: *Empty*

Memory Verse: “For it is by God’s grace that you are saved through faith. This salvation is God’s gift. It’s not something you possessed.” -Ephesians 2:8

Message: **Empty Hands** -Pastor David

Text: “I desire mercy [faithful love] and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God instead of entirely burned offerings.” -Hosea 6:6

Sermon Scripture: Amos 5:21-24; Matthew 9:9-13

Reading of Scripture: Matthew 9:9-13

Blurb: What can we offer God? Less than we might think. The truth is, anything we bring before him belonged to him in the first place. We come before God empty-handed and that is just the way he intended it to be.

[Recorded Worship Beginning]

WELCOME -Pastor Andrew

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor Andrew

“For it is by God’s grace that you are saved through faith. This salvation is God’s gift. It’s not something you possessed.” -Ephesians 2:8

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

In the Cross of Christ I Glory
Have It All

[Live Worship Beginning]

GATHERING SONG: *10,000 Reasons* -Sanctify

WELCOME -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

“For it is by God’s grace that you are saved through faith. This salvation is God’s gift. It’s not something you possessed.” -Ephesians 2:8

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

In the Cross of Christ I Glory
Have It All
Hymn of the Holy Spirit
Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Both Recorded & Live Worship]

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 9:9-13 (CEB) -Reader: Michael Berglund

Jesus calls Matthew, a detested tax collector, to be one of His disciples. When people question this choice, Jesus tells them to go learn a quote from Hosea 6:6. Matthew 9:9-13,

“9 As Jesus continued on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at a kiosk for collecting taxes. He said to him, ‘Follow me,’ and he got up and followed Him. 10 As Jesus sat down to eat in Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners joined Jesus and His disciples at the table.

11 But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’

12 When Jesus heard it, He said, ‘Healthy people don’t need a doctor, but sick people do. 13 Go and learn what this means: I want mercy and not sacrifice. I didn’t come to call righteous people, but sinners.’”

LOVE.GROW.SERVE. MOMENT: Blackford Scholarship -Cassi

GENERATIONAL BRIDGE: -Pastor Andrew with children.

MESSAGE: Empty Hands

PP#1: Empty Hands

“I desire mercy [faithful love] and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God instead of entirely burned offerings.” -Hosea 6:6

Empty Hands. Hosea 6:6, God proclaims, “I desire mercy [the Hebrew word here is *hessed*, also translated as faithful love] and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God instead of entirely burned offerings.”

PP#2: *Images of Corrie Ten Boom (preferred holding or wearing gloves) and brown gloves from the series.*

Corrie Ten Boom, one of my heroes, was a Dutch Christian whose family hid Jews during the Nazi occupation during WWII. They were discovered and all sent to a concentration camp. Only she survived. Their story is *The Hiding Place*. Well, she became a renowned Christian speaker who used vivid images for sharing the Gospel. One of them was the simple glove. She said how God made us like gloves. He made us to fit His image, made in His image. Yet, when by ourselves, we are flat and useless, and lifeless. It is only when we are filled with God’s presence that we finally become who we are meant to be. We need to invite the Holy Spirit to fill us. Only then are we fully animated and useful. We need to ask for the hands of God that made us to be the hands that fill us.

PP#3: *Image of The Creation of Adam from the Sistine Chapel ceiling by Michelangelo.*

One of the most famous paintings in the world features God's hand. Michelangelo painted the story of creation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Using his new, although controversial style of rendering bodies realistically—and naked like in ancient Greece and Rome—he chose, in *The Creation of Adam*, to depict the creating God in human form (wearing white and with white hair to show His purity), creating a human form like His. The painting focuses on the connection between the Creator and the created, with the touching of the Divine finger to the man's. The Bible said that God shaped the clay into the form of a human, and then God *breathed* His breath of life into the creation. Michelangelo captures the moment when Adam comes alive, prompted by God. Adam's first instinct is to reach out to his Creator, who is reaching out to him: with just a finger—tenderly, with restraint—lest God's power overwhelm the new creation. This striking image evokes our human purpose: we are made to reach out to God. God reaches out to us, extends His hand to us, animating us, filling us. We are made to hold hands with God. (And, by the way, Michelangelo answers the age old question: Adam had a belly button!)

Now, I'm going to show you a blasphemous version of this painting, so brace yourself.

PP#4: *Image of The Creation of Adam adapted to make it look like God is offering Adam a pizza!*

See that? My guess is that this was photo shopped by some hungry teenager who was having a hard time staying focused while doing an art assignment! But to me, it still captures a divine truth that is so important. Do you see how God is offering the pizza to Adam? The waking Adam, of course very hungry, is taking the yummy slice *from God*. The pizza here helps us remember the flow of action: it is God who offers the good gift, and it is Adam who receives it. The hands of the painting now help us see the right interplay of the divine-human relationship: blessings flow *from* the hand of God *into* the hands of people: *from God to people*.

Church, we need to remember the pizza!

PP#5: *Image showing people offering up sacrificial offerings IN THEIR HANDS to a god or altar.*

You see, too often we slip into the role of *us* offering gifts and deeds and works to God. You know, it's surprising how often, when I tell people I'm a pastor, that people stumble over themselves to tell me how much they don't need my religion. Many folks tell me that they are getting along just fine because—and here is the reoccurring phrase—they are being *a good person*—at least better than many others—and that God will take them in. The common belief out there seems to be that God takes *good* people to heaven when they die.

Now, what does being “a good person” mean? Well, it means doing good things. It means being honest, helpful, kind to others, assisting when and where you can, it means being a decent person, a productive citizen. It means giving money to help those in need, being a person who would do anything for anyone. We all know what it means to be a good person. And, most people think that good people go to heaven, bad people don't. This, I have found out, describes what over half of the people I talk to believe.

What this is really saying—the main point—is that God created us to offer Him good things. The Divine-human relationship, then, is that God is watching and waiting for us to see what we do with our hands. We are to be filling our hands doing good deeds that will please God, which we lift up to God as a sacrifice. We think we make the pizza and offer it to God!

PP#6: *Image of a kid offering a reluctant parent a gross homemade gift, like food or a craft.*

This is an affront to God! After all, we cannot do any real good, actually, on our own! It's like I volunteering to help clean and restore Michelangelo's painting. I'd go get a bucket with soap and water and a sponge. See? I'm helping! Aren't you happy with me? The horrified art restorer cries, "No! You must stop! You're actually making things worse!" Or it's like that awkward moment every parent has when their kid has been "cooking" in the kitchen. They present you with a pile of mystery that makes you gag, made with hands right off the playground, and you heard them sneeze into it three times as they made it. "Aaaa...how nice, honey. You worked so hard on this. Thank you!" But then they stare at you wanting to see you take a big bite. They tried so hard—worked so hard—but it's not fit to eat! This is what anything good we try to do looks like to God. He's glad we tried, but literally, it does no good!

And, what turns God's stomach is when we believe that the good we try to do, makes us deserve His favor and blessings. First of all, we're dead wrong. Second, it shows we think too highly of ourselves. And third, it robs God of His role of blessing us...putting us in His role.

PP#7: "When Jesus heard it, He said, 'Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. Go and learn what this means: I want mercy and not sacrifice. [Hosea 6:6] I didn't come to call righteous people, but sinners.'" -Matthew 9:12-13
 "I desire mercy [faithful love] and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God instead of entirely burned offerings." -Hosea 6:6

Jesus preached that God doesn't want our pathetic attempts at sacrifices for Him. When Jesus called Matthew, a hated tax collector, to be one of His disciples, people protested. Jesus responded, "Go learn what God meant in Hosea when God said, "I desire faithful love and not sacrifices!"

PP#8: Amos 5:21-25 (CEB)

- 21 I hate, I reject your festivals;
 I don't enjoy your joyous assemblies.
- 22 If you bring me your entirely burned offerings and gifts of food—
 I won't be pleased;
 I won't even look at your offerings of well-fed animals.
- 23 Take away the noise of your songs;
 I won't listen to the melody of your harps.
- 24 But let justice roll down like waters,
 and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
- 25 Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
 during the forty years in the wilderness, house of Israel?

All over the Bible we see God hating our attempts to be "good enough." The prophet Amos speaks God's anger when people do religious activities as a way to earn God's favor and blessing. Let's look at Amos 5:21-25,

- "21 I hate, I reject your festivals;
 I don't enjoy your joyous assemblies.
- 22 If you bring me your entirely burned offerings and gifts of food—
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 24 But let justice roll down like waters,
 and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
 25 Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
 during the forty years in the wilderness, house of Israel?"

Religious practices aren't what we do to please God. Actually, they are gifts from God to bless us. We don't do them to earn God's favor. They help us stay close to God. So, they aren't *for* God. They're *for us*!

And look at what God says in that last line: "When I chose you as my own, you had nothing to earn me. You were slaves! You had nothing! And you were miserable, exhausting, stiff-necked people! When you wandered in the desert for forty years, what did you have to give to me back then? Your hands were empty! It was I who gave you food, and water. It was I who protected you, fought for you. I chose you not because you had anything to make me desire you. I chose you simply because I did. It is I who gives to you!"

That's grace!

PP#9: "For it is by God's grace that you are saved through faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed." -Ephesians 2:8

"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." -Romans 5:8

"What are human beings that you [O God] think about them; what are human beings that you pay attention to them?" -Psalm 8:4

"Job responded to the Lord: 'I am nothing. What can I answer you?'" -Job 40:4

That's grace! This is the central message of the Gospel. This is the core of salvation in Jesus. Ephesians 2:8 "For it is by God's grace that you are saved through faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed." Your hands were empty! Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

When God creates Adam and Eve, God gives them everything. The only thing God wanted was a relationship with them. God made them with empty hands so that God could fill their hands with good things, and so that in the cool of the day, they could walk hand-in-hand.

When God chose Abraham, Abraham was a nobody. God chose Him because He wanted a restored relationship with His people. God chose the Israelites while they were slaves. Now, God did give them a religious system that required them to do good and make sacrifices. But these have always been about blessing us, not God! God owns everything, anyway! It's like my kid getting a \$20 bill out of my wallet and putting it in my birthday card as a gift to me! God doesn't NEED anything from us! God calls for sacrifices from us because they keep us coming to Him, thinking about Him, working on our part of the relationship. We need the religious practices. We respond to God's love by loving others. It doesn't *make us* good enough for God. It *shows* God's love for us. All the good that God desires of us, all of it is merely how we humans respond to the blessings that God pours out into us. *It's handing on to others what God first puts in our hands.*

Think about how we people enter life. Babies are completely helpless and needy. And we die the same way! We leave everything we've ever done or earned behind. At birth we come from God empty and we need everything provided. At our spiritual rebirth, we come to God with empty hands and we receive the blessing of salvation from Him. At death, we enter glory—into God's very presence, with empty hands, having left everything behind.

PP#10: Empty Hands

1. Come to God with empty hands

This Lent, we are seeking to become empty before God. We're offering Jesus an empty chair in our hearts. We are emptying our lives to make room for more of Jesus. We empty our words so we can instead speak God's words of life. We come to God with empty tanks. And today we are remembering to empty our hands. Stop trying to be a good person in order to earn God's favor. You can't earn it, because your hands are dirty! And you need not earn it, because He already favors you! It's time to empty our hands of all the ways that we strive to be worthy. What do you need to put down? What are you carrying around...what pittance—pitiful garbage—are you carrying around hoping it's valuable? When you finally put it down, you can then see your dirty hands. You can come to Jesus and ask for Him to wash your sins away through the forgiveness He earned for you on the cross, and make you clean.

And here is God's miracle. It is only when we put down our garbage and get our hands clean that we then have hands able to receive—to hold—God's intended blessings for us. Here's the key image: it is God's hands that are full! We need empty hands in order for Him to hand off what He wants to give us. God's hands are already full: stop trying to give Him stuff! Instead, you need to empty your hands so He can give His stuff to you!

PP#11: Empty Hands

1. Come to God with empty hands
2. Let God fill your hands

Here's the second miracle. What God gives us is full and abundant life. God already favors you! But now, you become fully and truly *animated*. Remember Corrie Ten Boom's glove? When we let the God who designed us for Himself to fill us, we now become fully who we were intended to be. And it is only then that we do the good that God wants. We don't do it in our own strength, but by the hand of God in us and through us. Yes, we were made to do good. Yes we must do good. But we do it only by coming to Jesus with empty hands, having Him fill us up with unending blessing, and then handing it off to others, sharing with others what we receive. This is the good that God requires of us.

This also means that we must be careful not to have sticky hands. We don't keep God's blessings just for ourselves. Just like we must empty our hands before coming to God, so we must also keep emptying our hands after we have God. We must keep handing off blessings so that we can continue to receive more, so we can continue to pass on more to others. Every day this Lent, we must empty our hands. Keep giving and doing and working for God, keep emptying your hands!

PP#12: Empty Hands

1. Come to God with empty hands
2. Let God fill your hands
3. Expect empty hands from others

There's one more implication here, I think, though. We must also pass along God's expectation of empty hands. We need to receive others the way God receives us. Too often we expect others to do certain things, behave certain ways, be certain ways. And this can really hurt our relationships!

Think about your spouse. Do you have a contract marriage? That means things work if each of you performs well. Performance based marriages are how the world understands marriages. They are contracts that depend on good behaviors. The problem is that we will all fail, mess up, and grow weak. We will not be able to maintain our part of the bargain. That's why so many marriages fail, they're based on a 50-50 agreement. A spouse, if a good person, may overcompensate for a while, but over the long haul, a contract marriage falls apart. God defines marriages differently. He defines them just like He does salvation. He gives His all to us first. And God calls His people to give their all to their spouse. It's a 100-100 agreement. It stays intact even if one side fails completely. That's God's intention for marriage. If you want to learn more about that, come talk to me.

Or how about your kids. Do you try to control their lives? Do you demand that they live just the way you want them to? Do you require them to perform and do things your way? Remember, pass on to others the blessings you've received. Treat them like God has treated you!

We've been to God, so we've learned differently. We've learned how to expect empty hands from others. Only then can we have the full blessing of those relationships.

PP#13: *Michelangelo's The Creation of Adam with the pizza added.*

Hard stuff, right? It's easier to hold on to your garbage! But we are on our lenten journeys. And that means that we remember the pizza. It's in God's hands, and we empty ours so we can receive it from Him!

Amen.

PRAYERS -Pastor David

Prayers for those married, from *UMBOW* page 132.

CLOSING SONG: *Blessed to Be a Blessing*

OFFERING: -Pastor David

-Give of your monies to God's work through this church. You can give in person, mail it in or, most conveniently, you can make an automated transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the "square" on the bulletin.

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

Next Sunday: Palm Sunday! Empty Savior -Pastor David

Easter Hop - Easter candy in the parking lot!

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"For it is by God's grace that you are saved through faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed." -Ephesians 2:8

BENEDICTION -Pastor David