

Pastor Rob's farewell Service

26<sup>th</sup> February, 2017

Text: "For I hold you by your right hand - I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, 'Don't be afraid. I am here to help you'." Is 41:13 (NLT)

As I was reflecting on this day and what I wanted to say to you, there was one word that kept coming back to me. The word "hands".

Almost 11½ years ago – at a Call meeting here on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 2005 – hands were joined together in prayer to seek God's guidance about who you would offer the Call of Senior Pastor to. And then you voted – with hands raised – and you issued the Call to me. A number of you – people in leadership at PoP - then took pen in hand and you signed this Call Letter. Later that day Michael Stolz appeared on my doorstep with things in both his hands: the Call letter in one, and a bottle of red wine in the other!

I have to say, it weighed heavily in my hands. Not the bottle of wine, but the Call. Would I be able to carry out the duties I'd been called to perform? I mean, I had never been in a senior pastor position before. And PoP was a much more complex place than any of my previous parishes. And then to step into a community that was still very much grieving for Ps Mel. Overall, the Call to Prince of Peace was a pretty frightening prospect, I don't mind admitting.

Well, my hands spent a lot of time intertwined in prayer over those next 4 weeks as I considered that Call. And with ever-increasing clarity God's voice spoke; *"For I hold you by your right hand - I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, 'Don't be afraid. I am here to help you'."*

They are powerful words when facing your own doubts and insecurities. That's an emboldening promise when you feel week-kneed. And so with the belief that God was calling me to PoP – and with his promise that his strength would be there for me – I accepted the Call. And on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, 2006, our partnership in God's mission began. And hands again were prominent. The hands laid on me by the leadership of the PoP community. The hands that came together in acclamation as I was presented to you as your new pastor. And – for the first time – our handshakes at the door at the end of the service.

Hands. My hands. If they could speak, they would talk of an amazing journey. Sometimes they were sweaty – in apprehension of the size or complexity of the task at hand. Other times they were tired because sometimes ministry is just a slog. At times they were fidgety – just eager to get on with the next exciting project; other times still and calm as God just did his stuff around me. There were times when my hands were calloused – when I felt like I was hitting up against a brick wall. And times when they felt especially sensitive, vulnerable – that any pressure would be magnified. There were times – not often - but times when these hands felt crushed and I just wanted to put them in my pockets and hide. Times, too, when they were just plain hard – hard and unfeeling towards you. Mostly, though, they felt grateful, privileged, blessed to be held by your hands, to be embraced by and in partnership with an amazing group of people in this community.

And through it all, God's hands kept reaching out to me. Comforting me. Challenging me. Healing me. Stretching me. Moulding and shaping and fashioning me. As his hands have continued to do for you. I am not the same as I was when I came here 11 years ago. You are not the same. We are not the same. The master Potter has been working on us: shaping us,

moulding us, refining us. And sometimes that process has been painful as he challenged and confronted and stretched us. But he needed to. So that our hearts and minds beat more in tune with his. And so that we were clearer about and committed to the values that he wants us to hold on to and the mission that he sends us out into.

We have changed. We have grown. Thanks to God's creative handiwork. But there is still more growing, still more refining to go. And God – over a number of months last year – was clearly saying; “Rob, your hands have accomplished what I planned for you in your season there. But a new season is needed. New hands are needed.” And so this day of farewell has come. Where – after 11 years of being hand in hand in the mission – our hands will part. And at the end of this service I will stand at the door and shake your hand for the last time as your pastor.

It's into the unknown for me. Some of you have experienced retirement. For years. But I haven't. For 62 years I've experienced childhood and adolescence, courting and marriage, parenthood and empty nest. For 35 years – my entire working life – I have had the privilege of serving God as a pastor. But now what? What will this next chapter hold for me? For Beryl? We don't know.

And nor do you know! Those of you in the PoP community, the future is somewhat clouded too. Over the years, you've probably grown accustomed to my quirks and idiosyncrasies. You've got familiar with me, used to having me around. But that's about to change. And in God's timing - a new lead pastor will come. And he will have different hands! He will have different gifts and abilities. So don't compare him with me. God has created him to be uniquely him. And the one God calls will be uniquely gifted to partner with you and grow with you in this next chapter in mission here at PoP. And you will grow to appreciate him and value him and love him too.

You know, amidst all this change: for me, for you, for us – one thing remains the same. God's hand. His hand is the constant. Because this place – PoP – is his place. And it's history is his story. Of how his hand of challenge tapped the members of West Chermside Lutheran church on the shoulder and placed the dream in their hearts of a missional church and school to be planted in a lettuce field. And how those courageous, faithful members responded to that challenged and stepped out in faith. And kept stepping out in faith. In employing staff to grow the mission and moving beyond a single stream primary school to a double, then a triple stream primary school. And taking the huge step to purchase a multi-million dollar block of land and build a secondary campus.

And His story hasn't yet finished. Not by a long shot. His story continues. With the closing of this chapter. And the beginning of a new chapter. Where your hands will join with the hands of the new pastor. And together, your hands will be enveloped in the hands of the Master Potter. And a new chapter of blessing will begin.

And when you get a bit anxious about things – about when this new pastor will finally be called, and when he might finally arrive, and what he might be like, and how you and he will get along – all those natural questions that the unknown brings – just listen to the voice of God. Hear his promise. Claim his promise. And open you hand to receive his; *“For I hold you by your right hand - I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, ‘Don't be afraid. I am here to help you’.”*