

Sermon on Sunday 22 February 2026 by Rev. Alan Stewart

Readings: Exodus 17 8-13; Gospel: Matthew 4 1-11

Hand-Holders and Angels

'I believe you can *speak* things into existence'.

That's definitely giving off some serious Genesis vibes, isn't it? In the beginning, God spoke... and the world was.

But it's not from that ancient creation story, it is in fact a quote from none other than American rapper, businessman and husband to Beyoncé; Jay Z.

This is what's commonly known as manifesting; the practice of using words, thoughts, emotions and actions to attract specific outcomes. It's based in fact on the 'law of attraction', the belief that 'like attracts like'. So, think good things and good things will happen. It's something I hear a lot on reality TV and social media: 'I'm manifesting success, wealth... my future husband!'

I actually think there's a lot to be said for aligning our thoughts, emotions and actions with the reality we wish to create, but it seems to me that for most people, it's mostly about them; their own personal success. And here's where it's different to prayer. Prayer isn't me-centered, it's God-centered. It's not *my*, but *Your* will be done. It's aligning our words, thoughts, emotions and actions with the reality that God wishes to create.

In our first reading, where the Israelite army are battling against the Amalekites, Moses engages in a very physical act of prayer or endurance. He believes that as long as he keeps his hands in the air, the Israelites will win. Now, it's a problematic story, for sure, which begs questions like 'does God really work like that?' This morning however I want to focus on the two supporting characters in the story, literally. After a while Moses's arms give up, so Aaron and Hur step in to hold up those hands until the sun sets, until the battle is won.

It reminds me that there are times in my own life when I'm too weary, too sad, too disillusioned, too overwhelmed to pray. And it's in those moments that I depend

on others to do the praying for me; to support me, to hold me up with their prayers, until I can pray again. At times it's been an absolute lifeline.

We all need Aarons and Hurs in our lives.

Fast forward to our second reading. After the punishing heat and hunger and heart-searching of the desert, Jesus too, needs support.

This devil-voice from within or beyond, had tried to undermine and cast doubt upon his identity and calling and relationship with God. And after this battling, he's physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausted. So, we're told, actual angels come and attend to him. What a lovely image that is. I like to think that alongside food, water and foot-rubs, they brought a reassuring presence and encouragement, literally the gifting of courage.

Again, we all need angels in our deserts; people who will gift us with courage and assurance and presence; people who'll pray when we can't, who'll make tea and send texts and sit with the silences.

This is the calling of this company we call Church. We are all called to be hand-holders and angels.

In prayer, we support and surround and lift and defend each other. And in God's economy, it's prayer that holds us together. It's what breaks down the very human barriers we create. It's where empathy and understanding and perspective are born. It's where God's agenda becomes our agenda. It is the very oxygen of our lives and the life of this community. That's why we gather each month to pray. That's why we call that gathering Breathe. Without prayer, we suffocate. So, please consider making that a monthly commitment. Your church depends on it.

During this season of Lent, I'd like to encourage us all to try to be a little more intentional in our prayers.

It's an invitation to make prayer knots for Lent. I'd invite you now or later to find a piece of string about 6 or 7 inches long. And then, take a moment just to sit with the quiet. Allow God's spirit to surface in your mind's eye those people who might need us to hold their hands up in prayer, to tend to them in whatever desert they might find themselves. And when someone comes to mind, just tie a knot in the middle of the string. And then when someone else comes to mind, tie another

knot to the right or left. Tie as many knots as you need, and feel free to add knots at any time.

And I'd ask you to make a promise to these people, that every day you will take that piece of string and as you hold their particular knot, and you'll pray for them with the words on the **card** or your own words or without words. And there's a promise here. God will work with those prayers for the good, the wellness, the wholeness of each one, as we align our words, our thoughts and our actions with the reality that God wishes to create.

Here's that prayer to end.

*May your eyes be open to the miracle of each moment
and a warm embrace hold you this day.*

*May you have the courage to know
and accept yourself and others,*

and may beauty and friendship brighten your life.

*May the kindness of God the Father complete you;
the company of Christ the Son walk with you
and the love of the Holy Spirit empower you
today and always.*

Amen