

Proper 12 (Series B)

“Entrust Your Days and Burdens” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #754)

“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him, and He will act.” (Psalm 37:5)

Since that day when the gates of Eden were closed by sinners, sorrow has surged through the days and lives of every human being who has or will live on this earth. Beneath the veneer of happiness that covers so much our lives are the burdened hearts of young and old alike, some crying in silence of lonely homes or even lonelier hearts. Others cry out quite openly and loudly for release and relief from their burdens. In his hymn, “Entrust Your Days and Burdens,” Pastor Paul Gerhardt (1607-76) gave us words to express our prayer for God's help.

The size and shape of the burdens of life vary, from heavy to light, some crushing and oppressive, others merely irritating. Some burdens people take on themselves, while others are the consequences of sin and guilt. There may even be burdens that God Himself has laid upon us as part of His design in grace for life. The next time you join fellow Christians in worship, look around. You will see a company of people carrying burdens, people who are seeking comfort, forgiveness, help, and hope.

It is interesting to note that Gerhardt gave no detailed description of the burdens people bear. Nor did he hint at the burdens that he bore throughout his life. After his education at the University of Wittenberg Gerhardt started his ministry in the midst of the Thirty Years War (1618-48). He knew the devastation that came from war. He knew the sorrow that came from the loss of his wife and four of his five children to the enemy of death. Throughout his ministry Gerhardt knew also the grinding friction in matters of

conscience especially with church and state. The result was often the loss of his employment within the church. The Lutheran church in Lübben, Saxony, where he spent his final years as pastor, commissioned a painting of Gerhardt after his death. A Latin inscription on the painting summarized well his life: "Paulus Gerhardt the theologian, tested in the sieve of Satan, subsequently dying a godly death in Lübben in the year of 1676 in his 70<sup>th</sup> year."

While none of this is mentioned directly in his hymn, all of these burdens were the background for every stanza. What is important is what to do with those burdens:

"Entrust your days and burdens  
To God's most loving hand."

It is in God's most loving hand that we find hope. Right? Do the ancient promises given through the psalmist hold true? "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him, and He will act" (Psalm 37:5). "Cast your burden on the LORD and He will sustain you" (Psalm 55:22). Is there really assurance in Peter's first epistle (5:7): "[cast] all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you"? Did our Lord really mean it when He said: "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? We come to Him, and yet affliction seems to remain.

Sometimes we find it hard to take God at His word and cast our burden on Him. We think we can carry our own burdens, assuming that God is too remote to be of much help to us. Besides, what could God know about our ordeals? Gerhardt struggled with these same questions and thus writes:

Rely on God your Savior  
And find your life secure.  
Make His work your foundation  
That your work may endure.

Christ invites each of us burden bearers to cast our burdens on Him, for He has already carried our heaviest burden when in His work as our Savior Jesus carried sin and guilt—our sin, our guilt—to the hill of the Cross. On that Cross Christ gave His life to lift that heavy burden from us. In His invitation and assurance we know that there is no burden He refuses:

Take heart, have hope, my spirit,  
And do not be dismayed;  
God helps in ev'ry trial  
And makes you unafraid.

God does heal diseases in His own way and time. Jesus gives us His forgiveness to heal our lives. Christ is our peace for troubled homes, lives, and times. Jesus is comfort for our lives and hearts broken by sorrow and pain. God gives us the daily bread we need. He mends and sustains our lives with His love. All of this is the premise behind Paul Gerhardt's hymn that encourages us:

Leave all to His direction;  
His wisdom rules for you  
In ways to rouse your wonder  
At all His love can do.  
Soon He, His promise keeping  
With wonder-working pow'rs  
Will banish from your spirit  
What gave you troubled hours.

Reverend Henry V. Gerike  
Kantor, Church of the Reformation—Lutheran  
Affton, Missouri  
halfschott@aol.com



Entrust your days and burdens to God's most loving hand;  
he cares for you while ruling the sky, the sea, the land.  
For he who guides the tempest along their thund'rous ways  
will find for you a pathway and guide you all your days.

Rely on God your Savior and find your life secure.  
Make his work your foundation that your work may endure.  
No anxious thought, no worry, no self-tormenting care  
can win your Father's favor; his heart is moved by prayer.

Take heart, have hope, my spirit, and do not be dismayed;  
God helps in ev'ry trial and makes you unafraid.  
Await his time with patience through darkest hours of night  
until the sun you hoped for delights your eager sight.

Leave all to his direction; his wisdom rules for you  
In ways to rouse your wonder at all his love can do.  
Soon he, his promise keeping, with wonder-working pow'rs  
will banish from your spirit what gave you troubled hours.

O blessèd heir of heaven, you'll hear the song resound  
of endless jubilation when you with life are crowned.  
In your right hand your maker will place the victor's palm,  
and you will thank him gladly with heaven's joyful psalm.

Our hands and feet, Lord, strengthen; with joy our spirits bless  
until we see the ending of all our life's distress.  
And so throughout our lifetime keep us within your care  
and at our end then bring us to heav'n to praise you there.

Text: Paul Gerhardt, 1607-76; translation by F. Samuel Janzow, copyright © CPH.

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