

July 19, 2026

Our Lives Are Held in God's Hands

By Pr. Beate Chun

Ausgang!

Grace to you and peace
from the one who is,
and the one who was,
and the one who is to come.

Many years ago,
I was traveling by train in Germany
with a friend from the United States.

It was a hot summer day,
and somewhere along the journey
I fell asleep.

Suddenly the train began to slow down
as it entered a station.

I woke up completely disoriented.
Had we reached our stop?
Or had we already missed it?
I turned to my friend and asked,
"Where are we?"

She looked out the window.
She did not speak much German,
but she could read it a little.

Then she answered confidently,

"We're in Ausgang."

Now I was fully awake.

And laughing.

Because Ausgang simply means exit.

It is not the name of a city.

It is simply the sign
that points the way out.

"Ausgang und Eingang"

For many Sundays now,

we have begun worship

by singing the German round

"Ausgang und Eingang"

based on Psalm 121.

Today I want to tell you

how that little song came into being.

The year was 1962.

A young church musician,

Joachim Schwarz,

was traveling across Germany by train

to lead a youth retreat.

It was a long journey.

The train stopped many times.

Again and again,

he saw the sign: Ausgang.

But this was not an ordinary year.

A group of young people from Berlin

was expected at the retreat.

Only a year earlier,

the Berlin Wall had been built.

Suddenly,
the word *Ausgang*
carried a much deeper meaning.

An exit is something
we usually take for granted.

A way out.
A possibility to leave.

But now,
for many people in Berlin,
that possibility
had become uncertain.

Would those who traveled
be able to return?

Would there still be
an *Eingang*?

Would they find
the same home
when they came back?

Their going out
and their coming in
had become something
they could no longer control.

And perhaps that is why
this song came to Joachim Schwarz.

The words simply came:

Our going out
and our coming in,
our beginning
and our end
they lie with you, Lord;
fill you our hands.

Later he explained,

"I was thinking not only
about the political situation,
but also about time and eternity:
departure and entrance,
beginning and ending.
We do not have our lives
in our own hands."

A very specific political moment
is woven into this little canon.

And yet the song reaches far beyond
that moment.

Because it speaks
to something
every one of us knows.

We do not have our lives
in our own hands.

We Do Not Have Our Lives in Our Own Hands

"We do not have our lives
in our own hands."

These words from Joachim Schwarz
came to my mind as I reflected
on this week's reading from
Paul's Letter to the Romans.
Paul speaks about a journey.
A journey from death to life.

From an old understanding
of ourselves
to a new understanding
of ourselves.

Paul says,

We are no longer obligated
to live a self-directed life.

What is that? A self-directed life?

By a self-directed life,
Paul means a life
that imagines
everything ultimately depends
on us.

A life that believes
we alone must secure our future
justify our existence
and somehow hold our world together.

But Paul says,

That is not
the life God has created for us.

Because the truth is:

**We do not have our lives
in our own hands.**

But neither do we have to.

Because there is another way of life,
a life directed by the Spirit.

So, what does this other way of life look like,
a life directed by the Spirit?

Does the Spirit now
tell us what to do
at each turn of the road?

Does the Spirit whispers
the right answer
into our ear every time
life confronts us
with an impossible choice?

That would be great,
especially in those moments,
when we face difficult decisions:

Whether to let someone go.

Whether to accept
a new opportunity.

Or how to go forward
when every option
comes with a cost.

It would sure be nice
if the Spirit gave us pointers
with these difficult decisions.

But this is not how it works.

A Spirit-directed life
is not a life where we are spared
these agonies.

But:

A spirit-led life is a life
without the crushing burden
of believing that everything
finally depends on us.

Because even when we discover
-looking back later on -
that we chose poorly,

even then our lives are still
held in God's hands.
And there is
deep comfort and peace in that.

Martin Luther once wrote,

*"Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain
that one could stake one's life on it a thousand times."*

Because our going out.
Our coming in.
Our beginning.
Our ending.
are all held by God.

Held for the sake of all creation!

Our world longs for such people:
people who know that their lives are held by God.
People who carry
that quiet confidence in a fearful world.

Because creation, Paul says,
is still groaning.

And all around us
we see so much suffering
and injustice.

But here Paul gives us
another remarkable reassurance.
These groans are not signs
that God has abandoned creation.
They are birth pangs!

God is bringing
a new creation
into the world.

And here is the astonishing part:
This new creation is already beginning
to be revealed among us!

Among people
who forgive
instead of seeking revenge.

Who carry
one another's burdens.

Who refuse
to let fear have the last word.

Who welcome
the stranger.

Who keep singing
when the future
is uncertain.

Spirit creates that kind of community,
a community where
the future
breaks into
the present.

So that those around us
can catch
a glimpse of the world
God has always intended.

That is our vocation, our calling, as Christians
and as a congregation;

Not simply
to wait for God's future,
but pray for it,
to sing about it
and to become

a sign of it.

The Journey Continues in Hope

Joachim Schwarz
boarded a train
filled with uncertainty.

He did not know
what the future
would bring.

He certainly did not know
that the little song
born on that journey
would still be sung
more than sixty years later.

The Holy Spirit
took one person's uncertainty
and turned it
into hope
for generations.

And so that is my takeaway from
this middle passage of Romans 8:

Creation still groans.
We still groan.
The future is still hidden.
And life is always uncertain.

But through it all, our life,
our going out
and our coming in,
our beginning
and our end,

our best decisions
and our regrettable failures
all of it is held in God's hands.

Thanks be to God!
Amen.

Sermon for Sunday, July 19, 2026 - Pentecost 8

Presented at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church San Francisco

The seventh in a series of Sermons on the Letter to the Romans.

Text: [Romans 8:12-25 NRSVue - So then, brothers and sisters, we are - Bible Gateway](#)

Tags: Romans 8:12-25 | Beginnings and Endings | Coping with uncertainty