



HOLY HANDS?

Genesis 2:4-8, I Timothy 2:8, John 20:24-31

The fact that God gave humans a hand, rather than a paw or hoof is one main way God set us apart from all the rest of his creation. Have you thought about your hand? Did you know there are 27 bones in it:

8 small carpals
5 tubular metacarpals
14 shorter tubular phalanges.

Only we have true opposability (we can rotate our thumb inward).¹

However I believe even more important than what human hands can do - is how they help us to relate to God and to each other.

It has been said that the eyes are the window of the soul. If that is true, then perhaps we can also properly say the hands are the mirrors of one's character. What a person is, deep inside, is as much shown by the hands as it is by the face.

Yes, our hands frequently mirror our character. They are also a remarkable instrument revealing the true nature of our hearts. Someone has said a helping hand is a heart with fingers. I really like that definition. So often in evangelical circles we talk about committing our hearts to Jesus - I wonder why we omit the hands. If our hands reveal what is truly in our hearts - then perhaps we need to ask **"Are your hands - holy hands?"** If not, why not?

Somewhere I picked up a story that I put into my files about a very talented brain surgeon in St. Louis whose hands were responsible for saving and improving the quality of life for many people. However, one day he went home - and used those same hands - to beat his wife to death. That story demonstrates so beautifully how our hands have the amazing possibility for good and evil.

As you can see from our various Bible lessons today - the hand is not forgotten in the pages of this sacred book. The hand has been the subject of devotional and literary masterpieces - with perhaps the most famous piece - written by Myra Brooks Welch about an auctioneer and an old violin entitled **"The Touch of the Master's Hand."**

Maya Angelou, the gifted poetess from Arkansas, remembers her mother running her hands through her hair and hugging her and reminding her that she was no failure -

that God truly loved her. Oh, the power of loving hands.

In Easton, Pa., where I once served - one of the young men who attended the church was admitted to the hospital. It was discovered that he had the **disease AIDS**. When I completed my visit - I offered my right hand to share a moment of prayer together. He had tears in his eyes. He said it was the first hand extended to him in fellowship - except for the staff doctor who specialized in the field of infectious diseases.

Oh - the importance of a human hand.

The reason I extended my hand to this man was that God has extended his powerful right hand so many times in my life that if I am going to really serve him - I better follow his example. If hands - nailed to a cross - continue to love me - then I have no alternative but to follow his example.

From our Old Testament lesson today in **Genesis 2:4-8**, we see that God created the world with his hands - that he used his hands to scoop up some dust from the earth and breathe into him the breath of life. From Psalm 95:4 we read "**In His hands are the depths of the earth - and the mountain peaks belong to him - the sea is his - for he made it - and his hands are the dry lands.**" The Creator has creative powers in his hands.

Even slaves in the South knew that God controlled their destiny and wrote:

**He's got the whole world
In His hands,
He's got the whole wide world
In His hands.**

This truth gave them courage and strength to fight and struggle for their God-given dignity as children of God made by the Creator's hand.

Today, I want to share three movements about our hands - than can literally transform our lives and church.

FIRST, PUT YOUR HANDS BY FAITH IN THE GOOD HANDS OF GOD.

Long before Allstate Insurance thought it up God's hands - were the Good Hands. From Psalm 139:10(NIV) we are told and assured "**If I rise on the wings of the dawn - if I settle on the far side of the sea - even there your hand will guide me - your right hand will hold me fast.**"

Shortly after our children - Jennifer Lyn and John Wesley - were born they taught me a great lesson. They have taught me several things - not all for which I have volunteered.

But on the first night of each of their lives on earth, Jennifer and John taught me the

lesson of trust. I was with Mary in the hospital - and at night the custom is - to allow the father to hold the new baby. I put the tiny head in my left hand - and the little bottom in my right hand - and walked proudly around the room. I held them like that hundreds of times during their first years of life. That was how I realized why it was God gave us two hands - instead of one. We have a hand for each end! Many of you know I love to hold the small children of our church. I really have enjoyed holding our newest grandson – Eric John.

But I learned something else as well. Looking at their small body, their eyes were closed - and muscles relaxed, I saw a perfect example of total trust. They knew they were safe and secure, and so they were able to let go and simply be trustful. They were not afraid of falling, though I was petrified that I might drop them. With no education or experience at all, being less than twelve hours old, how on earth could these babies have learned to trust like that, I asked myself? And then I answered my own question. Jennifer Lyn and John Wesley felt totally secure because they were being held by the hands of their daddy. When there is a strong hand beneath you, there is no need to fear the problems about you.

The day came when Jennifer and John learned their father's mouth and hands were extremely fallible. However, I taught them that even when mortal hands fail them - there are Immortal Hands that never will. Even when we fall into hell and fear all of life is being taken away, even there - those mighty hands of God are holding us up, keeping us safe and making us secure. Your faith cannot keep you from falling into adversity and other difficult moments in our faith journey - but even then we can lean on the Everlasting Arms of God. This is why Jesus could say in a prayerful manner at the cross **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."**

Isn't that what Thomas had to do in our gospel lesson today? Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your fingers here - see my hands." Reach out your hand. Stop doubting and believe.

Yes, the first movement - the first step is to commit and place your hands into the hands of God. That is what **Isaiah 41:13** exhorts us **"For I am the Lord, your God - who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear, I will help you."**

SECONDLY, GIVE YOUR HANDS IN LOVE TO THOSE WHO ARE CLOSEST TO YOU.

Before you act globally to save the world - begin to act locally with your new found trust in God. C.S. Lewis once said that, "Hell is a place or a condition where peoples' hands have been closed into a permanent fist. Where their teeth are clenched and their eyes are closed. Where people have become so completely wrapped up in themselves that only the Almighty himself can open them up." Ask God for the power and insight to begin to use your hands in his service to those around you.

If you are a mother - like Maya Angelou's mother - run your hands through your child's hair at the right moment and make feel that they are the most precious child in the world. Children and grandchildren are to be loved - never, never beaten or abused.

If you are a father - put your arms and hands around the shoulders of your child and let them know you are with them completely.

In sports competitions athletes share with each other the High 5 sign with their hands - as a sign of encouragement and support.

I am now holding in my hands - the famous work of art, **The Praying Hands**. Most of us are familiar with the "Praying Hands" by Albert Durer. This set I am holding was a gift from the Eubanks family in Schuylkill County. Since Mary and I have been here in New Holland, they both have gone on to their heavenly home.

The artist shows nothing but a pair of hands - in a posture of prayer. As we look at those hands, we are reminded of how that work of art came into existence. Durer was a poor struggling artist - living in Germany with another poor struggling artist. They were literally penniless and starving. They made a pact between themselves.

Since Durer seemed to have more artistic talent, he would continue with his study of art and the less talented friend - would take a job to support them both. Then when they were able, his friend would return to his study of art. The loyal partner got a common laboring job so that they both might eat.

Finally one day, Durer came home elated. He had sold a piece of art for a considerable sum of money. Now there was enough money for both, and his friend could return to his study of art. But when his friend picked up the brush to begin to paint, he found that his hands had become rough and course. These gnarled fingers were insensitive to the delicate skills - so essential to an artist. Durer was devastated! Though he would love the man forever, there was nothing he could do - to restore the skills that harsh labor had rendered impossible. One day Albert Durer returned home and found his friend in deep prayer - with his hands clasped together. In a moment of inspiration Durer sketched those hands with broken fingernails and enlarged joints. And he gave those hands to the world--gnarled hands made beautiful by loving sacrifice.

The artist expressed his love for his best friend by using his hands to express the love and sacrifice for the hands that encouraged him along. By acting locally - you can have global impact. The late Mother Teresa often shared, "I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God who is sending a love letter to the world."

When you achieve some success in this movement you are ready for the next.

THIRDLY, GIVE YOUR HANDS IN MINISTRY AND SERVICE TO OTHERS.

Our Lord believed that people can make a significant difference by reaching out with a caring hand. Jesus refused to accept the idea that people are nothing more than the helpless victims of heredity or history or fate.

When I served in Chester, Pa., and was active in the issue of homelessness, I had the opportunity to meet a young man named Trevor Farrell, who now must be around 40 years of age. When he was a young lad, he was watching TV one night and saw pictures of some homeless people. He asked his parents if they had any extra blankets they could give to the homeless. So he had his parents drive him from the affluent suburb into the city where he gave a blanket to someone who was freezing on the street corners of Philadelphia.

So Trevor and his friends began distributing blankets and food. When he was interviewed on national TV, he said he did what he did - because of Jesus inside of him. His parents have opened a home for the homeless in Philadelphia, and it is called "Trevor's Place." His final words in the interview were these, "We used to just read the Bible, now we are living it." His hands became the hands of Jesus.

This is why - in **1 Timothy 2:8** - it shares "**I want men everywhere to lift holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.**" When you are not arguing and fighting - you can set your hands to the plow of the kingdom.

This is the same spirit that motivates the great work of Habitat for Humanity which Fred Nolt of our church is involved in. It is called the "Theology of the Hammer." A hammer needs a loving hand to build or re-build a house for a needy family.

Now that the three movements are complete - here comes the finale - the mandate - your marching orders. **USE THE HANDS YOU HAVE.** Don't complain about your hands - use them - give them to him.

This litany which came to me via the Internet says it best:

"What is that in your hand?"

A rod in the hand of Moses, yet when surrendered to God it worked deliverance for a people in bondage.

"What is that in your hand?"

A jawbone of an animal, yet with it Samson slew the Philistines and through him God delivered a people.

"What is that in your hand?"

A sling and five smooth stones, yet with it David slew Goliath and the victory came again to the people of God.

"What is that in your hand?"

A pitcher of water, yet surrendered to the Master, it was transformed into wine to meet the needs of the hour.

"What is that in your hand?"

A handful of bread and a few small fishes yet yielded to the touch of the Master it fed a multitude and brought honor to God.

"What is that in your hand?" Whatever it is- Give it to the Master!
Are your hands holy hands? If not – why not?

Reverend Eric S. Ritz, February 24, 2008, All Rights Reserved - Copyrighted 2/24/08

Endnotes:

- 1.) Thanks to Earl C. Davis, Trinity Baptist Church, Cordova, TN, for this illustration.