

“The Hands of God”

Isaiah 49:1-7

January 19, 2020

Did you ever realize how many different ways you can communicate with your hands? A hand that reaches out to shake another says, “Hi, nice to meet you, I’m glad you’re here.” A hand placed on someone’s shoulder says, “I care about you, I hope you’re all right.” A hand waving says, “Hello” or “Good-bye” or “Come Here.” Someone who moves their hands rapidly while they’re speaking indicates that they’re very excited about something, especially if they put their hands up like this to indicate a touchdown while watching a football game tonight.

But hands can also communicate anger. A hand made into a fist to hit someone indicates violence may happen. A hand can hold a weapon to threaten or kill. Or hands can be put up in defense in an effort to protect from those who want to use their hands to hurt or abuse.

Hands communicate in many different ways and the Bible uses this truth to tell us about God. The whole creation, all of the universe, is said to be the work of God’s hands. God’s hands hold everything together. We even sing, “He’s got the whole world in His hands.” Whenever we read about God’s hands in the Bible, we learn a lot about His awesome power, His just punishments, His loving care, and His almighty protection.

And the same can be said about Jesus. He is God’s Son, yet He is also God; so whatever is said about God’s hands can be said about Jesus’ hands. For example, there’s His awesome power that is displayed through miracles. With just the touch of His hand, the deaf hear, the blind see, and the crippled walk. We see just punishments as Jesus takes His hands and flips over tables to drive the money changers out of the temple or with the wave of His hand He sends demons away. Then there are His loving, caring hands that touch children in order to bless them.

Whenever we have a baptism here in the church, we read in the Bible how “People were bringing little children to Jesus to have Him touch them” with His hands “but the disciples rebuked them. The disciples didn’t want children to come to Jesus. Why? Maybe they didn’t want Him to be bothered by such insignificant little ones when important ministry needed to be done. After all, right after this happened the Bible says that a rich man then came to see Jesus. And yet, the disciples did not try to stop him from seeing Jesus. Perhaps they thought the rich and powerful needed to see Jesus, not a bunch of noisy children. Maybe they saw the children as being of very little value, in that they didn’t work or make any real contribution to society, so why should children take up precious time with Jesus.

When Jesus saw the way the disciples were acting He was very unhappy. Instead He welcomes the children. Can’t you just see His hands waving off those disciples with a “Stop that,” kind of movement and then motioning with His hands for the children to come to Him. Finally, He lovingly reaches out His hands and He touches them and blesses them. Jesus’ hands spoke volumes. They communicate His welcome, love, care, protection, and blessing. And not just for children. Soon after this event with the children, Jesus and His disciples were traveling along the road and a blind man shouted out to Jesus for mercy. Again, the disciples or others in the crowd rebuked the man and told him to be quiet, as if to indicate that Jesus doesn’t have time for someone like him. But Jesus stopped and ordered that the man be brought to Him. And Scripture tells us that Jesus put His hands on the man’s eyes and his sight was restored. Jesus’ compassionate touch and protective hands are for all people, regardless of size and importance in this world. In fact, He is especially compassionate and protective of those who are on the bottom of the social ladder – children, the blind, the crippled, lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. No one is too small or insignificant to be blessed by the hands of Jesus.

And it is important to remember that those hands of Jesus were just like ours. In other words, having celebrated the birth of Jesus about 4 weeks ago, we know that Jesus didn’t come to this earth as an adult. Verse 1 of our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah reminds us of this as the birth of Jesus is prophesied: “The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.” After His miraculous conception, Jesus grew and developed inside of His mother, just like every human being. That means His heart began beating at around 24 days, by 7 weeks He had little feet and little hands, and by 8 weeks He, like all of us, was a tiny baby about an inch long and weighed less than an ounce. Eventually he was born and he grew, and His hands grew – from infancy, to childhood, to a teenager, and to an adult.

So why is this important or why did God choose to enter the world as human being in this way? If you were God and wanted to save your creation from sin, death, and the devil, then why enter the world by being born as an infant? Why not arrive as an adult, with bulging muscles, on a white horse with a huge flaming sword, accompanied by legions of angels? Psalm 51:5, after committing adultery with Bathsheba, David said, “Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” Since our humanity begins at the moment of conception, this means our sinfulness begins at the moment of conception. And since our sinfulness begins at the moment of conception, then our Savior from sin had to begin His sinless human life from the moment of conception. To be our Savior, Jesus took our place, not only on a cross and in a tomb, but also in the womb of his mother. It was necessary for our eternal life in heaven that the Savior and servant, Jesus, be born of a woman. And those hands, which started and grew just like ours, but were nailed to a cross remind us that everyone, no matter how important or unimportant, big or small, helpless or strong, has a Savior. Yes, Jesus’ hands, the hands of God, tell us a lot about Him, but where are those hands today?

They are right here in the Church, where Jesus promised to be, working in all of you to bring blessings to anyone who is seen as insignificant, of little value, or not worth the time of day – like the mentally challenged, the older adult in the nursing home with Alzheimer’s, the homeless man on the street, or the murderer on death row. When we use our hands to do the work of God, then our hands become His hands in this world, and they communicate a lot about the Savior we worship. Your hands, the hands of Christ, can help, care, show compassion, defend, build, carry, provide, and they can choose – “I want you.”

Several years ago I received an email from a Lutheran minister in Baltimore, Maryland, explaining that a couple from his inner city church had been arrested once again for drugs. The couple had two children, 4 year-old twins, a boy and a girl. The couple was informed that the children were going to be taken from them permanently and placed into foster care until a home could be found for them. The pastor, who sent his email to many Lutheran Churches in the southeast, asked if anyone would be willing to adopt these two children, who did have some problems as a result of the parents’ drug use. He said that he was hoping to keep the children together and the only way that could happen was for a family/couple in Baltimore to adopt them. Otherwise, if no one in Baltimore was able to adopt both of them, they would then consider splitting them up. In less than 24 hours, I received another email from this pastor, explaining that 16 people from Lutheran churches in Baltimore, wanted to adopt both of these children. Many pastors, like myself, did not even have the chance to get the word out to our congregations of this need, before 16 people came forward – anxious to be the hands of God to these children.

Look at your hands, they are the hands of Christ, use them to be a blessing to others, because there are so many people who are treated as insignificant or unimportant, and they are in danger of being forgotten and trampled on in our world. The hands of Christ are right here in this church and I praise God that we are a church body that seeks to help the poor and needy, and supports the sanctity of life at all stages, recognizing that all of humanity – young or old, fit or feeble, born or unborn – is precious in God’s sight.