

THE PENNY DROPS

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 3rd Sunday of Easter, May 4, 2003.
Scripture: Luke 24:36b-48

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

On the evening of the first Easter, the Risen Christ suddenly appeared in the midst of his disciples in Jerusalem and showed them his *hands*. Last week we read that Jesus appeared to his disciples and showed them his hands. The following week he appeared to doubting Thomas and said, "Reach out your *hands* and place your fingers in the mark of the nails in my *hands*."

Think of how many times the Gospel writers draw attention to the *hands* of Jesus. Jesus stretched out his *hand* and touched Peter's ailing mother in law and her fever left. Jesus placed his hand on a deaf man who with a speech impediment and he was immediately healed. Jesus took little children in his arms, laid his *hands* on them and blessed them. Jesus took the *hand* of a little girl who had died and the dead girl got up. Jesus put saliva on a blind man's eyes and laid his *hands* on him and his sight was restored. Jesus took bread in his *hands* and blessed it and broke it and fed 5000 hungry men and women. In the Gospel of John Jesus says that the Father has placed all things in his *hands*. And Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. No one will snatch my sheep out of my *hand*." Then his hands were nailed to a cross. He died and was buried. But on the third day God raised him from the dead and he appeared to his disciples and showed them his hands? Can you picture his hands?

Notice first that the hands of the Risen Christ are wounded. They bare the marks of the nails. Last week's Gospel lesson said that the wounds were big enough for Thomas to place his finger in it. Does that surprise you? It surprised me. Wouldn't you think that God would have raised Jesus with a body that no longer showed signs of his suffering and death? The Risen Christ could appear and disappear – why couldn't his body have been healed? But his wounds weren't healed. I think Jesus showed his disciples his wounded hands to demonstrate that the Risen Christ is and always will be a wounded healer, a wounded Savior. G.A. Studdert Kennedy wrote of the Risen Christ,

See the wounded God go walking down the world's eternal way,
For His task is never done.

Several years ago Henri Nouwen wrote a book entitled, The Wounded Healer. In it he says that perfect people have a hard time helping imperfect people. Parents struggling with problem children can't appreciate advice given to them by parents with perfect children. Parents who have lost a child find greater comfort talking with friends who've also lost children rather than parents who have healthy children. An alcoholic finds encouragement when a recovering alcoholic says, "I've been sober for 10 years now." A man or woman going through a painful divorce does not look for comfort from a couple celebrating 50 years of blissful marriage. The person who is most helpful in healing our wounds is a wounded healer.

When Jesus showed the disciples his wounded *hands* he wanted them to know that God is a wounded healer. Christians believe that Jesus is God in the flesh. God has taken upon himself human flesh with all its weaknesses; with all its susceptibility to pain and suffering. When Jesus said, "I thirst", God thirsted. When on the cross Jesus said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" – God experienced the dark night of the soul and the pains of the damned in hell. Jesus fell asleep in a boat on the Sea of Galilee to reveal to us that God knows what it's like to work a 12-hour shift only to come home to fix dinner and clean up afterwards. The God we worship and know through the Risen Christ is a wounded healer.

There's a hymn in the Episcopal Hymnal. "Look there! The Christ, our Brother, comes resplendent from the gallows tree – and what he brings in his hurt *hands* is life on life for you and me." Those hands, those wounded hands, those hands of the Risen Christ offer life for you and me.

Now I want you to notice something else about the hands of Jesus. Jesus invites his disciples to touch his hands. On Good Friday his disciples had thought they'd never feel the touch of his hand again. But on Easter Sunday he suddenly appears and shows them his hands and *invites them to touch them*.

One of the things we often miss most when a loved one dies is the touch of their hands. When Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in 1995, the whole world was touched by the grief of his young granddaughter who eulogized him. She said, "Grandfather, others greater than I have already eulogized you, but *none of them ever had the pleasure I had to feel the caresses of your warm, soft hands, ...* which (are now) frozen in the grave with you." But, although Jesus had been dead, he is now risen. His hands are no longer

cold and frozen in the grave. His hands now pulse with life and he shows us his hands and invites us to touch him.

The great Victorian poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, whose life spanned most of the 19th century, lost his best friend, ^{Arthur Hallam} Edward Markham, when Markham and Tennyson were in the early twenties. ^{Hallam} Markham drowned in a boating accident. He had been engaged to Tennyson's sister – but, beyond that, Tennyson loved ^{Hallam} Markham as a brother. Tennyson never got over ^{Hallam} Markham's death. For the next twenty years nearly every poem Tennyson wrote alluded in some way to his friend ^{Hallam} Markham. In one of his poem Tennyson says, "Oh for the touch of a vanished *hand* and the sound of a voice that is still!" I know what he's talking about and so do you. Our Gospel lesson speaks directly to our longing for the touch of a vanished *hand* and to hear the sound of a voice that is still.

Some of you will not agree with what I say next – but I want to tell you what I believe even though you might not agree. I have a great hope that I will once again touch the hands of my loved ones who have died and whose souls are in heaven waiting for the day of resurrection. Their bodies may have been buried or cremated or lost at sea but I believe they will be raised – how? I don't know. Christians believe in the resurrection of the body, not in some disembodied state that will last throughout all eternity. I don't know what kind of a body we'll have at the resurrection on the last day. I can't even conceive. As different as the seed of an oak tree from the full-grown oak will be the difference between our body that will be buried and the body God will raise up. At every committal service I say,

In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life,
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
we commend to almighty God our sister,
and we commit her body to the ground,
earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Because of Christ's resurrection, because he appeared to his disciples and showed them his hands and invited them to touch them, I believe we also will be raised – and will, once more touch the hands of our loved ones. The Risen Christ says to us, "Look at my hands... touch me." Look at his hands! Maybe you've read the short little essay on the value of our hands. It goes something like this:

A basketball in my hands is worth about \$19.

A basketball in Alan Iverson's
hands is worth about \$30 million.

A baseball in my hands is worth about \$6.

A baseball in the hands of Barry Bonds is worth \$19 million.

A tennis racket is useless in my hands.

A tennis racket in the hands of Venus or Serena Williams
is worth a Wimbledon championship.

Two fish and 5 loaves of bread in my
hands is a couple of fish sandwiches.

Two fish and 5 loaves of bread in
Christ's hands feed thousands.

Nails in my hands might produce a birdhouse

Nails in Jesus Christ's hands
procures salvation for the entire world.

When Jesus came to the end of his earthly life he looked up into the face of God and said, "Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit." And with that he died. I can't prove it, but I suspect that those words which he said before he died were words that he had said every day of his life from children. "Into your hands, I commend my spirit." When we see the wounded hands of the risen Christ we are seeing the hands of God

What if each morning when we wake up and before you get out of bed you begin the day with the prayer, "Into your hands, Lord Jesus Christ, I commend myself." And at the end of the day, as you begin to fall asleep, you pray, "Into your hands, Lord Jesus Christ, I commend myself." If we form the habit like that at the beginning and end of each day, won't it be natural at the end of our lives to say, "Into your hands, Lord Jesus Christ, I commend my spirit." Will we not die in peace knowing that Christ's hands were nailed to the cross to win for us the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting?

Let us pray: Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend ourselves. Acknowledge, we humbly pray, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Amen

THE PENNY DROPS

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Introduction: The Risen Christ shows them his hands (mentioned at least four times)

Think of how many times the Gospel writers draw attention to the *hands* of Jesus.

Peter's ailing mother in law - A deaf man who with a speech impediment - Little children
- a little girl - Saliva on a blind man's eyes - Bread

In the Gospel of John all things in his *hands*. ...No one will snatch my sheep out of my *hand*."

Then his hands were nailed to a cross. He appeared to his disciples and showed them his hands?

Can you picture his hands?

Notice first that the hands of the Risen Christ are wounded --

Why not a healed body?

Jesus is a wounded healer -- continues to be

G.A. Studdert Kennedy wrote of the Risen Christ,

*See the wounded God go walking down the world's eternal way,
For His task is never done.*

Henri Nouwen, The Wounded Healer.

Parents struggling with teenage children - Parents who have lost a child - An alcoholic - divorce
The person who is most helpful in healing our wounds is a wounded healer.

God is a wounded healer.

God thirsted - God experienced the dark night of the soul - Jesus fell asleep

The God we worship and know through the Risen Christ is a wounded healer.

*"Look there! The Christ, our Brother, comes resplendent from the gallows tree -- and what he brings in
his hurt hands is life on life for you and me."*

Those hands, those wounded hands, those hands of the Risen Christ offer life for you and me.

Notice - Jesus invites his disciples to touch his hands

disciples had thought they'd never feel the touch of his hand again.

-- We miss the touch of their hands. Yitzhak Rabin granddaughter

*"Grandfather, others greater than I have already eulogized you, but none of them ever had the pleasure
I had to feel the caresses of your warm, soft hands, ...which (are now) frozen in the grave with you."*

The hands of the Risen Christ no longer cold -- invites us to touch him

Alfred Lord Tennyson - Edward Markham *"Oh for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a
voice that is still!"* Arthur Hallam

Our Gospel lesson speaks to our longing...

Some of you will not agree with what I say next --

We will touch again - The resurrection of the body -- how?

Christians believe in the resurrection of the body, not in some disembodied state -- seed/tree

At every committal service I say,

*In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life,
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
we commend to almighty God our sister,
and we commit her body to the ground,
earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.*

Maybe you've read the short little essay on the value of our hands. It goes something like this:

Basketball - Alan Iverson's - \$30 million --

Baseball - Barry Bonds - \$19 million.

A tennis racket - Venus or Serena Williams

Two fish and 5 loaves in my hands -- hands of Christ

Nails

"Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit."

What if each morning when we wake up and before you get out of bed you begin the day with the prayer

Will we not die in peace

Let us pray: Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend ourselves. Acknowledge, we humbly pray, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Amen