

LENTEN II, 2009

March 4, 2009

The Body of Christ, the hands of Christ!

Introduction

1 Cor. 12 'we were all baptized into one body', Romans 5 'in Christ we form one body', Colossians 3 'as members of one body ... let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.' By means of God's Word and God's Sacraments, Baptism and Communion in Christ, we have been recreated into: **THE BODY OF CHRIST - His Holy Christian Church, a communion of saints!**

We are, so to speak, Jesus with skin on, we are the ears and hands and mouth and feet and eyes and the heart of Jesus for one another and for others. When great tragedies occur, personal tragedies or public tragedies, I can't help but think of 9-11, or the SE Asian tsunami, or the Gulf Coast hurricanes, or other man made or natural disasters. The question almost always asked is, 'Where is God'? Are you looking for God in your life? So many people are, but they're looking in all the wrong places. Simply, look around you, He is Immanuel = God with us, through His Word, through His Sacraments and through you and me, each other. **WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, WE ARE THE HANDS OF CHRIST!** And that is what I want to talk to you a little bit on this 2nd Wednesday Lenten Service of 2009.

I.

What comes to your mind when you think of hands? Something very emotional, no doubt, good or bad for that matter. The human touch is very, very powerful for good or bad. I want today primarily to think of good touch as we consider the hands of Christ.

The other day, I was visiting Frances Langum, whose funeral we held yesterday here at Immanuel. I told Frances' granddaughter, Jill, that I was going to share this story about the hands of Christ as it was seen with her Grandma. Frances' hospice caregiver was with her when I came to her Nursing Home room. The care giver was singing hymns and songs to Francis. And she said to me as I knelt beside Frances' bed, it was low to the floor so she wouldn't fall out, the caregiver said, 'I know Frances can't hear me, but hymns and songs are so comforting.' To which I responded, as I believe, 'her mind and body may not hear you, but her soul does'. As I knelt beside Frances bed I stoked her face and forehead, she was very agitated and crying out as she regularly did in her dementia 'help me, help me'. Singing her hymns and songs the care giver began to massage Frances' feet with lotion. And Frances agitation began to subside. The care giver paused and said 'ah, the power of human touch'. I couldn't help but be

reminded of the upper room on Maundy Thursday, **John 13** ‘the evening meal was being served and the devil had already prompted Judas to betray Jesus ... Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples feet ... ‘ do you understand what I have done for you?’ Jesus asked ‘I have set an example for you, do as I have done for you ... now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them’. Human touch, both bad and good, is powerful.

The first thing our own tiny hands touched was probably the finger of our Mom or Dad. Our parents hands caressed us, changed us, fed us, held us, washed more than our feet. Some might think about a father’s hands, calloused, strong hands teaching you to milk a cow, pitch a pitch fork, drive a car, hammer a nail, cast a fishing rod. Or you might think of a mother’s soothing hands on your forehead to check for a fever or bandaging a scraped knee or showing you how to use a dish cloth, or crocheting needles, or to push a vacuum cleaner. Human touch is powerful. The largest human organ in the human body is our skin with 1,000s and 1,000s of nerve endings which when touched are aroused, stimulated, activated for pleasure or for pain.

II.

‘God is spirit’ Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4, but our Spirit God loved us physical creatures so much to become human in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, as our Substitute and Savior. That message of God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of our Christian faith. Last week, Ash Wednesday being reminded we are ash and dust, we received the good news that our Spirit God has ears which hear and respond to us through the silence of the cross and the shout of the cross ‘It is finished’! Our Spirit God also has hands that touch, that feel. Jesus hands, which combine the strength of a father and the gentleness of a mother, strong as a carpenter and as gentle as a healer and foot washer are the hands of our Spirit God made flesh and blood.

The people who saw Jesus strong and gentle hands first hand said this ‘On the Sabbath Jesus began to teach in the synagogue. And many were astonished saying ‘Where did this man get all this ? ... what mighty works are done by His hands’! Gentle but strong things happened when Jesus’ hands touched people. Peter’s mother-in-law was sick we’re told. Jesus touched her hand and the fever left her. Jesus loved little children, ‘Let the little children come to Me’ Jesus said ‘for such is God’s Kingdom ... and He laid His hands on them and blessed them’.

Jesus’ hands touched leperous, contagious people. A leper came to Jesus, knelt down before Him saying ‘Lord, if you are willing make me clean’. Jesus stretched out His hand, we are told, touched the leper and said ‘I am willing, be clean’.

There was a woman who, for 18 years, was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. This reminds me of Alma Heinen. Remember Alma and how crippled she was with her back? Jesus laid His hands upon this crippled woman and said, 'Woman you are freed from your infirmity'. She was made upright and praised God. Think of how Alma is praising God in heaven because of God's touch upon her. A blind man was brought to Jesus. We are told that Jesus took the blind man by His hand, spit, and laid His hands on his eyes, and the man saw everything clearly.

Jesus' touch even raised the dead. A man knelt before Jesus and begged, 'Come and lay Your hand on my daughter and she will live'. Jesus went into the house where the people were wailing. Jesus took the little girl by the hand, and she rose from the dead.

Jesus' hands also forgave. In our Gospel lesson for today, a woman was caught 'red-handed', so to speak, in the act of adultery. She was caught sleeping naked with a man to whom she was not married'. Jesus' hands wrote in the dirt, we're told. No one knows what He wrote. But, the message Jesus' hand wrote brought no condemnation, but only forgiveness to the adulterous woman. Touch is healing. Touch is soothing. Touch is peaceful, and touch is forgiving. God's touch, in Jesus Christ, is powerful and life changing.

II.

It's those same hand of Jesus, our Spirit God made flesh and blood, that healed Peter's mother-in-law, blessed the little children, touched lepers, healed the blind, raised the dead, forgave the adulterous, reach out and offer you healing and blessing and life and forgiveness, also. Meditate for a mere moment upon the statue of Jesus at the center of our altar. Notice Jesus hands are drawing you to Himself. Jesus hands are inviting you to Him. And most of all notice Jesus hands are nail pierced hands, blood flowing from His hands.

Those are the hands of God who is spirit made flesh and blood, incarnate hands nailed to a cross in our place. The hands of Jesus, though our Spirit God's hands, felt the touch of nails ripping through His palms and wrists, His muscle and tendons. The hands of Jesus felt the full weight of not only His human body pulling on those nails in His hands but Jesus nail pierced hands felt the full weight of our sins ripping and tearing on His hands, God's hands. I saw a plaque once which said 'God says He loves us this much, He stretched out His hands and died'.

A hole was gouged into the hands of Jesus as our Substitute, so when God looks at us sinners with our hands dirty with guilt He sees us through those nail holes of Jesus' hands He see us completely forgiven. Suspended there with His hands nailed in our place between heaven and earth as our Mediator, in a loud voice Jesus cries 'Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit'. The Spirit of God goes back to our Spirit God through the physical hands of Jesus as our Savior. Through Jesus we are placed into the

hands of God not for condemnation but for love and forgiveness. Those nail gouged hands through which God sees us, folded on Jesus chest in the grave, are raised in triumphant from the grave, He is risen, He is risen, indeed!.

The doors were shut, remember, and Jesus came and stood among His disciples and said, 'peace be with you ... put your finger here and see My hands, put out your hands and place it in My side, stop doubting and believe'. Jesus is alive, and He is drawing you to Himself, inviting you to take His hands of grace through your hand of faith.

Conclusion

It's those strong, gentle, loving, healing, touching, forgiving, living hands of Jesus which now send us, His Church, the Body of Christ, to touch other people's lives as our lives have been touched by Jesus. Like that hospice care giver massaging Frances feet with lotion, singing her hymns and songs = that's Jesus with skin on. Like you Dads and Grandpas helping guide your children and grandchildren's hands to milk a cow, or hammer a nail or ride a bike or cast a fishing line, whatever = that's Jesus with skin on. Like you Moms and Grandmas helping guide little hands, young hands to cook and clean and bandage and help, whatever = that's Jesus with skin on. You farmers, you business people, you office workers, you retired folk, you teachers, you nurses, whatever you are, whoever you are = you are Jesus with skin on. It's your touch for Jesus sake that is powerful; in a firm handshake, in a hug, in a slap on the back, in a good massage for your spouse. Gently, powerfully you are the Hands of Christ. Amen.