

Psalm 128  
Mark 6:1-6

Labor Day  
Midway Presbyterian Church  
September 1, 2019

## **The Hands of Jesus**

### *Introduction to the Psalm*

In our Psalm today we hear the blessedness of those who revere the Lord and walk in his ways. By the labor of their hands, they will be blessed. Blessedness in ancient Israel consisted of a productive farm, a faithful wife, and children around the table. Listen to these words from Psalm 128...

### *Introduction to the Gospel Lesson*

Our Gospel Lesson this morning tells of Jesus going to his hometown of Nazareth and experiencing rejection. Because of tensions between his obvious wisdom and power and his humble beginnings, people take offense at him. "Why, he's merely a carpenter!" Because of unbelief, he could do no mighty works in Nazareth. Listen to these words from Mark 6:1-6...

### *Sermon*

On this Sunday before Labor Day I want to think with you about the hands of Jesus. Have you heard the story of *Grandpa's Hands*? It describes many of the things a person's hands can experience in a lifetime.

Grandpa, some ninety plus years, sat feebly on the patio bench. He didn't move, just sat with his head down staring at his hands. When I sat down beside him he didn't acknowledge my presence and the longer I sat, I wondered if he was OK.

Finally, not really wanting to disturb him but wanting to check on him at the same time, I asked him if he was OK. He raised his head and looked at me and smiled.

"I didn't mean to disturb you, Grandpa, but you were just sitting here staring at your hands and I wanted to make sure you were OK."

"Have you ever looked at your hands," he asked. "I mean really looked at your hands?" I slowly opened my hands and stared down at them. I turned them over, palms up and then palms down. No, I guess I had never really looked at my hands as I tried to figure out the point he was making. Grandpa smiled and related this story:

"Stop and think for a moment about the hands you have, how they have served you well throughout your years. These hands, though wrinkled, shriveled and weak have been the tools I have used all my life to reach out and grab and embrace life.

"They put food in my mouth and clothes on my back.

"As a child my mother taught me to fold them in prayer.

"They tied my shoes and pulled on my boots.

"They have been dirty, scraped and raw, swollen and bent.

"They were uneasy and clumsy when I tried to hold my newborn son.

"Decorated with my wedding band they showed the world that I was married and loved someone special.

"They trembled and shook when I walked my daughter down the aisle and when I buried my parents and my wife.

"They have covered my face, combed my hair, and washed and cleansed the rest of my body.

"And to this day when not much of anything else of me works real well, these hands hold me up, lay me down, and again continue to fold in prayer.

"But more importantly it will be these hands that God will reach out and take when he leads me home.

"And with my hands He will lift me to His side and there I will use these hands to touch his face."

My friends, in order to realize our potential as Christians we need more than a Sunday Morning Faith; we need a faith for Monday morning. A faith for Monday morning is a faith in its working clothes, with its sleeves rolled up. God has so ordained life that we have periods for

rest and spiritual renewal. If worship and prayer and praise nurture our souls, then the world is the proving ground where our faith is tested.

A brief consideration of ways the New Testament speaks of the hands of Jesus can give new meaning to our faith.

First, the hands of Jesus were **working hands**. Picture him as the village handyman, strong hands wielding mallet and chisel, roughened hands repairing a sheep-pen. These are the hands of a manual laborer. And if we are correct in assuming that Joseph died while Jesus was young, they are the hands of the family breadwinner.

In Jesus Christ God has identified himself with our working lives. The fundamental dignity and value of our labor can be seen in those hands. Because God became a working man, he has lifted all work onto a higher plane. The hands of Jesus were working hands.

Some years later we may watch the hands that had mended the broken plough, still mending, but mending people now. For the hands of Jesus were **healing hands**. Mark says in our scripture today, “What mighty works are wrought by his hands!” But here in Jesus’ home town of Nazareth where friends, relatives, and family don’t believe in him, what he was able to do was rather limited. “He could do no mighty work there.” Even so, he still laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. He still heals, but now he most often uses our hands to do his work. Doctors and nurses, husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and neighbors. The church is the body of Christ on earth, and it is called upon to continue his healing ministry. To be his hands in caring for the sick and sorrowing.

Hands clasped in intercessory prayer are healing hands. The hand around the shoulder of a grieving church member or a shuddering drug addict is a healing hand. The “right hand of fellowship” is a healing hand. As is the hand extended to the lonely, the discouraged.

The hands of Jesus were healing hands. And our passage from Mark 6 speaks to us a word concerning the relationship between faith and wonderful events. The clear implication of the text is that if the people had believed in Jesus, he could have done a great deal more. The spiritual climate of a person or a congregation, the sense of expectancy, and openness to the power of God and new directions, will have a great deal to do with how much God can accomplish.

The people in Nazareth thought they knew Jesus so well. “Is not this the carpenter, and are not his relatives here with us?” It was inconceivable to them that God could be at work in the common place. The text from Mark suggests that the One we meet in Bible stories and corporate worship, is the One we meet in the common disciplines of the Christian life, and the lives of ordinary people around us. “Yet this ‘common’ one is the Holy One in whom the Kingdom of God draws near.”

Not only were the hands of Jesus **working hands** and **healing hands**, they were also **serving hands**. If we go in imagination to that upper room in Jerusalem, just before his betrayal and crucifixion, we see him girded with a towel, taking the dusty feet of his disciples in his hands and washing them—the act of a servant. The ministry of Jesus was spent in serving. For he came not to be served, but to serve.

We too are called to serve. And such service is not limited to the more obvious forms of Christian vocation—becoming a minister or missionary—nor the more usual forms of service in the church, such as a Sunday School teacher or Elder. For example, the young mother whose hands are busy in the home may be tempted to feel that she has no opportunity for Christian service. On the contrary, God has given her children to love and nurture. God has given her a home whose character can be a witness to others. God has given her a home to bear witness to

God's love and faith. Hers are serving hands. So also the hand that is raised to vote at the local council meeting or PTA; the hands that deliver Meals on Wheels; youthful hands that repair an elderly person's home; hands that prepare cards to be sent to church members; and hands that care for the church buildings and grounds. The Psalmist today assures us that,

Happy is everyone who fears the Lord,  
 who walks in his ways.  
 You shall eat the fruits of the labor of your hands;  
 you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you. (128:1-2)

The hands of Jesus were serving hands.

Further, we note that the hands of Jesus were **praying hands**. Time and again, we see him withdrawing to the wilderness to be alone with God in prayer. He taught his followers "The Lord's Prayer." And in the Garden of Gethsemane he prayed that he might not have to drink the cup of crucifixion; nevertheless, he prayed for God's will to be done. The hands of Jesus were praying hands.

And yes, the hands of Jesus were **nail-pierced hands**. The spectacle is almost too painful to picture. Through his hands the soldiers hammered the nails that fixed him to the cross. As in life, so in death, Jesus committed himself into the hands of God. And following his resurrection, he showed those hands to Doubting Thomas.

Only 33 years before, Jesus' hands had been the tiny hands of a new-born baby. Hands that grew, worked, healed, served, and folded in prayer. Nail-pierced now, these hands complete the story. They are hands that proclaim that God's love is so great that he is not only willing to live for us but to suffer and die for us well.

Those nail-scarred hands express love, acceptance understanding, and forgiveness—freely offered. For they are finally **open and inviting hands**.

I think when I read that sweet story of old,  
when Jesus was here among men.  
How he called little children as lambs to his fold,  
I should like to have been with Him then.  
I wish that His hands had been placed on my head.  
That His arms had been thrown around me.  
and that I might have seen his kind look when He said,  
“LET THE LITTLE ONES COME UNTO ME.”

Well, the hands of Jesus are still open and inviting. As he says,

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I  
will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am  
gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
(Matthew 11:28-29)

Jesus the Carpenter knew about the yoke of the oxen. With open hands he invites us to  
take on his yoke. Where the focus is on love for God, love for neighbor, and love for self.  
Doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. Where grace and truth are primary.  
The same God present in Jesus of Nazareth is with us today in Worship. And he'll be with us  
tomorrow and through the week, and through the rest of our lives, to lighten and enlighten our  
way. Thanks be to God.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.