

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

A person's hands can tell us a lot about where they have been and what they have done. Some people have hands that are smooth and clean, while others' hands may be bruised and scarred from years of difficult labor. Still others may not have hands at all because of disease, amputation, or injury. Many of my musician friends and colleagues compare the calluses on their hands based on which instrument they play. Oddly, it seems that talk of hands has even become important in the race to the White House.

Today's Gospel Reading focuses quite a bit on hands, especially on the hands of Jesus. On the evening of his resurrection, "Jesus came and stood among [his disciples] and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord."

What was it, I wonder, that the disciples saw? Was Jesus' side pierced? Did they see the holes in Jesus' hands where the spikes were driven into him? Clearly they were overcome with joy when Jesus stood among them in the flesh; yet, still wounded for our transgressions. The wounds in Jesus' hands tell us a lot about where he has been.

During this Easter season we continue to remember Jesus' death, even as we celebrate his resurrection. After all, the Jesus who was raised on the third day is the same one, body and all, who was obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

A poem by Pulitzer Prize-winning John Updike called *Seven Stanzas at Easter* comes to mind. Here are the first four of those *Seven*:

Make no mistake: if He rose at all
it was as His body;
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,
the Church will fall.

It was not as the flowers,
each soft Spring recurrent;
it was not as His Spirit in the mouths and fuddled
eyes of the eleven apostles;
it was as His Flesh: ours.

The same hinged thumbs and toes,
the same valved heart
that — pierced — died, withered, paused, and then
regathered out of enduring Might
new strength to enclose.

Let us not mock God with metaphor,
analogy, sidestepping transcendence;
making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the
faded credulity of earlier ages:
let us walk through the door.

Many say that Updike wrote this poem as a kind of “line in the sand” of what the church believes about Jesus’ resurrection.

I don’t know about you, but for me faith as certain as this is sometimes hard to come by. Just look at Thomas from today’s Gospel Reading, who was not with the rest of the disciples when Jesus came to them on the evening of his resurrection. Thomas did not believe the other disciples when they told him that they had seen the Lord. He needed proof; he needed to put *his* hand in *Jesus’* hands and side.

One week later, Jesus fulfilled Thomas’ need, inviting him: “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

As Thomas replied, “My Lord and My God,” it is clear that the same Jesus, who, before his Passion:
touched a man with leprosy and cured him;
took the hand of a twelve year-old girl and raised her from the dead;
placed his hands in the ears of the deaf and on the eyes of the blind;
now invites the hands of a sinner to touch his hands—
hands that, bruised for our transgressions, took away the sin of the whole world.

Jesus’ does not only heal physical ills; he even dispels doubt and grants the gift of faith.

Or does he?

What about our doubts? Where is Jesus when we want to touch his hands and side? Where is Jesus when we lose a loved one, when our relationships are falling apart around us, or when our emotions or addictions seem to get the best of us? In short, where is Jesus in our lives when sin seems to hold sway?

Jesus said to Thomas: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

It is, finally, through the hands of ordinary, sinful, broken, perhaps even doubt-filled people, that the Gospels were written and handed down to us through the ages. It is through our hearing of God’s Word that Jesus hands are extended to our ears, that, as St. John writes: “[we] may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing [we] may have life in his name.”

So where is Jesus? It is here, through the proclamation of his Gospel that we see the risen Lord (even if said proclamation takes place by Grace’s favorite Second-Sunday-of-Easter-preacher, the Cantor).

Where is Jesus? He is right here, in the body of Christ gathered for worship, in the word proclaimed not only through speech but also through song, in his true body and true blood in the Communion meal, and (as Martin Luther said) in the “mutual conversation and consolation of the saints.”

Just as God breathed over the waters at Creation, Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Jesus has now committed into the hands of his body, the Church, that saving work accomplished once and for all by *his* hands—the forgiveness of sins.

Like Annabel Leona who today is claimed by God and baptized into the body of Christ, we were each called by name in these waters and welcomed into the Lord's family, as the baptismal liturgy says: "that we may proclaim the praise of God and bear his creative and redeeming Word to all the world."

As members of this priesthood, the body of Christ, we come each Sunday with hands outstretched, and into our hands is placed the body of Jesus, that we might be sent as his living presence in the world.

And so, returning to John Updike:

Let us not mock God with metaphor,
analogy, sidestepping transcendence;
making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the
faded credulity of earlier ages:
let us walk through the door.

Yes, let us walk through the door. Let us proclaim the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. And, in doing so, may people see in our hands, our hearts, our voices, that we are a people baptized, called, claimed, fed and forgiven by the God who truly raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!