

Luke 24: 36-48

³⁶While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence. ⁴⁴Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things.

Hands and Feet April 15, 2018

*He's got the whole world in His hands
He's got the whole world in His hands
He's got the whole world in His hands
He's got the whole world in His hands*

*He's got the itty bitty baby in His hands
He's got the itty bitty baby in His hands
He's got the itty bitty baby in His hands
He's got the whole world in His hands*

*He's got the sisters and the brothers in His hands
He's got the sisters and the brothers in His hands
He's got the sisters and the brothers in His hands
He's got the whole world in His hands.*

In our lesson this morning Jesus comes again to visit the disciples after his resurrection and after again, speaking words of peace, he asks them to look at his hands and look at his feet. Not the way we usually introduce ourselves is it? I've never had anyone ask me to look at their hands or feet before as an introduction. Have you? When I was a child my father thought it was important that I knew how to introduce myself to people I was meeting for the first time. He taught me to always look them in the eye, and offering a firm handshake say, “It is very nice to meet you, Mr. Smith.” We actually practiced this until I did it to his satisfaction. He wanted to make sure I did him proud I think, and I hope that was the case. I suppose we are all witnesses to our parent's training. But Jesus didn't do that this morning.

In another sermon I read, the author asked a compelling question and it was: “Why did Jesus say, “Look at my hands and feet, rather than look at my face or look me in the eyes?” A very good question indeed, and it got me wondering about how our hands and feet, and our hands, in particular, tell a story about our lives.

I know when I look at my own hands I can see a history of my life. There is a scar here on the joint of my thumb where I cut myself with a hatchet. I was a teenager of course, and a friend of mine and I were camping, fortunately in his backyard, when I cut myself trying to split some firewood. A few stitches on that one.

There is also another one here on my palm where I accidentally stabbed myself with a wood chisel. More stitches. There is the tip of one of my fingers that I nicked with the table saw, fortunately just a graze and no permanent damage. There is a place on my right hand where I managed to cut myself with some flashing when we were building the house. There are various nicks and scars that become a map I guess of the history of my life. I even have a scar on my left wrist where I fell through a glass storm door as a child. Something that happened a lot in my generation before safety glass was required in storm doors.

I remember sitting in the hospital with my father as he lay in a coma after a stroke and holding his hands, feeling the warmth of them and trying to memorize every part of them before we let him go. I can still feel them in my memory. And I imagine that when I die my family and children will look at my many scars and remember them. Emily was with me when I cut myself on the flashing. And both my children will remember when I nearly cut my finger off with the table saw. I even have a few scars on my feet and ankles where I've had surgery. Anna will remember those. Somehow our scars define us, don't they? Hands and feet. I imagine your hands will tell a story too. I invite you to take a moment and just look at your own hands. What do you see there and what memories do they bring? Go ahead, take a look. If you're sitting next to someone you feel comfortable with, take a moment and look at their hands. Let them look at yours. I know some of you are here with family members and I'll bet you are already remembering things. Things that may bring a smile or a tear.

I probably could identify some of you by your hands. Some of you have strong powerful hands and others have soft and delicate hands. Hands that have worked hard and been in the weather. Hands that built things and made things out of wood, steel, brick. And hands that have created loving homes and art and music. Hands that gave healing and comfort. I've held many of your hands as we prayed together, and with some of you, I've just held your hands as we sat in the hospital for a visit. I have a very clear image of many of the hands I've held in both congregations. Hands that have reflected a lifetime of work and care and love.

And so it doesn't surprise me that Jesus asks the disciples to look at his hands and feet. To look at the scars that he carries with him that will remind them of all the time he spent with them and the love he had for them. It will also remind them of what his life's ministry was all about. And when they look at the scars they will indeed know that it is Jesus himself. His hands will give him away, won't they?

Barbara Brown Taylor shared a story that brought this moment to life in a powerful way for me. She tells of a dear friend of hers who lost his father quite suddenly to a heart attack. She tells it this way.

“By the time he got to the hospital his father had died and that made it even harder to bear. There was no goodbye, no “I love you,” no time to get used to the idea of losing him. The first chance my friend had to see his father was at the funeral home, where he walked right up to the casket and took one of his father's quiet hands in his own. They were the same shape and size, those two hands—big, competent paws that could fix anything—strong enough to build a porch swing, soft enough to pat a baby to sleep.

His father had been an auto mechanic who took great pride in distinguishing himself from what he called “shade tree mechanics,” those backyard amateurs who covered themselves with grease and left spare parts lying around all over the place. He, on the other hand, was a garage mechanic, who plied his trade as carefully as a surgeon. He kept a clean shop, and before he went home at night he scrubbed his hands with a boar's bristle brush, washing away the grime of the day.

But as careful as he was, his hands stayed stained in places, and it was that, that my friend was looking for. Turning his father's big hand over in his own, he saw the motor oil in the fingerprints, the callouses dark from years of overhauling engines, and he smiled. “It's him,” he said. “They tried to clean him up, but look, they couldn't. It's my daddy. It's really him.”

The disciples have had a difficult time with doubts and fears and even in their joy, they are disbelieving. Not unlike our own journey. And into this moment Jesus comes and offers them peace and lets them see his hands and feet to remind them of who he is and who they are. To remind them, and us, that he carries the scars of love and compassion in his hands and feet and asks us to remember.

And they will remember. They will remember those hands that broke bread with them. Hands that made mud to put on the eyes of a blind man. Hands that blessed children. Hands that caught fish. Hands that healed the sick and raised the dead. Hands that cured a raging demoniac who lived in a cave. Hands that washed their own dirty feet. Hands that were beaten and bloody. And they will remember feet that carried him along miles of dusty roads. Feet that never seem to tire, that knew where they were headed. Feet that walked on water. Feet that were washed with tears and anointed with costly perfume, feet that were pierced by nails; broken like bread and spilled like wine.

And he lets them look at all his scars and tells them to, “Have Peace and do not be afraid. You will have your own scars at the end as well, this is what discipleship is all about, but go out and share the good news anyway.” I would love to think that if I were to come back and show my family and friends my scars I would probably tell them the same thing. That all is well. Look at my scars and have Peace. It will be alright. Don’t worry. But don’t be afraid, because if you live this life of faith, you too will have a few scars to show for it. Can’t be avoided I’m afraid. But you are the hands and feet that are called upon to continue the story. This is what Jesus says, isn’t it? Go out and keep telling people about repentance and forgiveness. About turning back to God who loves you more that you can possibly imagine! “You are witnesses to my life” Jesus says. “You have seen the things we have done together and the trials and joys of a life walking and doing God’s will. The songs of love I taught you are within you and now it’s your turn to sing. I’m putting the story in your hands now. Peace be with you and know that I walk with you and live within you from this day on.” And don’t ever, ever forget,

*I’ve got the whole world in my hands
I’ve got the whole world in my hands
I’ve got the whole world in my hands
I’ve got the whole world in my hands.*

Thanks be to God! Amen.