

April 26,2020 “Hands of Blessing, Blessed Hands”

Psalm 63: 3-4

O God, because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my **hands** and call on your name.

Exodus 35:30-33

Then Moses said to the Israelites, “See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills— to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts.

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall **open your hand** to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

1Timothy 4:11-14

Command and teach these things. Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders **laid their hands** on you.

Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, **placed his hands on them and blessed them**

Luke 13:10-13

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” Then he put his **hands** on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Matthew 6:2-3

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, **do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,**

April 26, 2020. Zoom Sermon
“Hands of Blessing/Blessed Hands” (Celebrating, Creating, Giving, Ordaining, Blessing, Healing)
First United Church of Arvada
Rev. Karin Kilpatric

Today our scripture passages direct us to a few of the many sacred functions of our hands. Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher of the 4th century before Christ, called the hand the “tool of tools” for humanity. Our scriptures in both Old and New Testament, speak of these tools as the way the human will reaches out to God and to life around him or her in the sacredness of Celebrating, Creating, Giving, Ordaining, Blessing, and Healing.

So today, I want to pay tribute to human hands, to the beauty and expressiveness they have allowed us to share with each other and with our God, throughout time. Hands communicate so much of what we say to one another—they willingly add their voice to all conversation bringing along their transparency and honesty, grounding our talking with the body’s powerful non-verbal speech. They pull us into the quiet center of ourselves when we fold them in prayer. They show our appreciation for others in applause or even a hearty slap on the back. They shoo the anxiety out of our bodies with their caress and cure our illness with healing touch. They create beauty from the materials of the earth; wood, stone, dyes, gems, silk, wool, and metal. They charge us and bless us for our sacred work in this world.

Hands are among the most precious of universal ways of connecting with love of God and love of our neighbor: holding hands, shaking hands, speaking and gesturing with hands. So many of the uses of our hands are curtailed, even prohibited, in the hygienic protocol for this time of a contagious and deadly virus. It is a necessary change of behavior which must be respected and followed but it is also a loss we should recognize and grieve.

Wash your hands. Wash them again. Don’t touch your face, and certainly don’t touch another. Stay six feet away, wear a mask, wear gloves, stay at home, if you must leave

home for work or living necessities, wash the outside world away on your return. Yes, we must do these things as we cope with this hazardous time, so lethal to thousands upon thousands human beings around the world, especially older people whose immune systems are weaker and people whose bodies have been compromised through illness.

But not to recognize the loss of human intimacy in another's smile (which we cannot see under their protective mask), in the pain of being unable to hug a grandchild, in the absence of hand and body gestures that usually accompany our words and give them clarity and warmth, (now, limited by the flat screen of a computer), in the prohibition of gatherings for work or worship or celebration, we find ourselves emotionally isolated and psychologically confused. It is a profound loss..

As we consider the painful loss of physical closeness, we can at the same time reflect on the paradoxical value of this loss for our soul and spirit. When something is not allowed to be acted out in the physical realm, it can inspire us to take it into our hearts as a form of interiority, as an awareness now living within us which is asking to be cherished—which alerts us to the significance it holds for us. In this time of separation, something is asking to be remembered, to not be so taken for granted. It is asking to be remembered and treasured. One of the blessings of going to a memorial service for a loved one, is to experience how our hearts and bodies are full of the remembrance of this beloved one. In this new intensity of our heart's realization of who that person was and how much we cared (and care) about them, we access a spiritual side of their being and our own being's relationship to it. Our experience of loss uncovers a spiritual being which cannot be lost, but will always be there, even in the absence of the physical body. This kind of incarnating of love in your own soul and spirit depends on interior gesturing. That is how prayer works, we hold silence in an interior way, putting our recollected attention on a reality that lives in our hearts.

This reminds me of one recent public image in which absence communicated presence in an evocatively beautiful way. At the end of March, in the midst of the horror of the

coronavirus, Pope Francis was photographed alone as the darkness of evening was falling. He was walking in a now entirely empty St. Peter's Square, which usually holds tens of thousands of people, moving toward a white canopy singularly lit on the steps of the basilica. He was only a tiny figure in the midst of a vast empty landscape but this tiny figure was clearly a voice for the world, offering a prayer of hope. He spoke about how we have had to realize we are in the same boat, all of us human beings, fragile and disoriented. And yet in our fragility, there can be a new-found recognition that we are all needed, that all of us are called "to row together, each of us comforting the other." He spoke of how the virus had exposed people's vulnerability "to those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules." He spoke of how God is asking everyone to "reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering." The bareness of the scene appeared as a kind of spiritual presence—an angelic message. The empty vastness became a container for God's spirit, to be recognized, to claim center stage, to be felt fervently.

Another image that, in its simplicity, held much beauty was that of a Grandmother and Grandson, she outside and he inside, each of them pressing an open hand with fingers spread wide against the hand of the beloved other, separated by a windowpane. Despite the impossibility of feeling the softness and warmth through the glass, it was clear that somehow, they both did—that the material substance of glass could not divide the affection that each had for the other. The "not touching" became the most "touching" thing about this image. Here, again, the absence of something became an even stronger spiritual presence.

In their emptiness in the wake of Jesus' death, his disciples had to take the Christ Spirit into their own spirit. That is what in-spiration literally means. The disciples made a new home within themselves, which would become a fount of new courage, understanding, and faith. Christ's absence was now a strong spiritual presence.

Today, our hands, may have to be washed and covered and kept in check. They may have to be more restrained and cautious in public. But, as symbols of the power of the human will, as the sacred tools that have always directed us to that which needs our focus and attention, they must also be revered and trusted. Today, instead of blessing another with our hands; as in baptism, confirmation, ordination, or dedication, we will bless our hands, themselves. Please hold or fold your hands as I close with a blessing.

Blessed be our hands that touch the world with kindness.

Blessed be our hands that guide our children and youth.

Blessed be our hands that greet the stranger and serve those in need.

Blessed be our hands that cook and comfort, that create beautiful things and play beautiful music.

Blessed be our hands that plough, and plant and harvest God's green earth.

Blessed be the hands that nurse the ill and heal their sickness.

Blessed be the hands that catch a newborn child as it enters this world.

Blessed be our hands, folded in prayer, that guide us in the ways of justice and peace.

God has given us holy hands. We hold the future of this planet and its people within them.

Blessed be our hands, O God, for they are the work of Your hands. **Amen.**