

**John 20:19-31 (NRSV) ~ *Jesus Appears to the Disciples***

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

***Jesus and Thomas***

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin<sup>[1]</sup>), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." <sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

***The Purpose of This Book***

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe<sup>[b]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah,<sup>[c]</sup> the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

**The Hands of the Risen Christ**

Hands! Do you remember the hands of your loved ones? There are certain characteristics of my loved ones' hands that are indelibly imprinted (so to speak) in my memory. My mother's hands have always been smooth, with very large veins. And as a child, I remember that her hands usually smelled like Jergins hand lotion. My father's hands were tense. My grandmother's hands were small, with tiny fingernails, and lightning fast! And my grandfather's hands were large, muscular, rough, and he had a hairy notch on his index finger where he had taken a hunk out of his finger and had to have hairy skin from his arm grafted into the hole. Grampa's hand were so muscular that he won the

Mayor's Milking contest at the Bradford County Fair for 12 years in a row! I can remember being very surprised when, at the age of 95, Grampa's hands became more smooth and soft, and lost their muscular shape.

I could certainly recognize these special people by the sight of their hands, even if I could not see their faces or bodies. But to touch their hands would add even more certainty to their identities. And, to be touched by those precious hands would add a sense of safety when crossing the street, 'would give me peace and comfort when I was sad, and would calm my fears when nightmares disrupted my sleep.

So our hands can be an identifying characteristic. The same was true when the disciples of Jesus were trying to wrap their minds around the whole concept of Jesus' resurrection. Shortly after that first Easter, Peter and John gathered with the other disciples in that secret and secured room to talk about the empty tomb and the possibility of Jesus' resurrection. As they were talking, Jesus came and stood among them. They must have been startled, frightened, wondering whether they should stay or run, trying to decide if this was all real or a dream, a vision, a nightmare. But Jesus reassured them by showing them his hands and side. How often had the disciples seen those hands of Jesus touch blind eyes so they could see? How often had they seen his hands bless little children? How often had they seen him reach out his hands to lift those unable to stand and say, "Walk." And Jesus had just used those hands to wash the disciples' feet in the upper room before sharing the last supper together. The sight of those hands, pierced with nails during Jesus' crucifixion was indelibly imprinted on the memories of the disciples. They saw the hands of Jesus and they knew that he was resurrected from the dead. They heard his greeting of "Peace" and their troubled souls were calmed.

However, Thomas was not present when Jesus first appeared to the disciples, and naturally, he doubted their tale. Now to doubt is NOT a negative trait, for doubting can lead to learning and growth and believing. So, Thomas issued the imperative, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." Jesus affirms Thomas' need and comes to the disciples once again. Jesus knew what was in Thomas' heart, and provided the assurance he needed, showing him those unmistakable hands scarred by nails, and side which had been gashed by a sword. Skepticism and doubt vanished, as Thomas professed his faith, exclaiming "My Lord and my God!"

Today, as we look with Thomas at the hands of Jesus, there are three things which I believe Jesus' hands say to us: they remind us of Jesus' suffering, they remind us of Jesus' love, and they call us to put our faith into action.

A story by Leslie Flynn gives us an apt illustration. She speaks of a small boy being raised by his grandmother in a frontier city in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Imagine that place with no automobiles, no electricity, no telephones. One night the house caught on fire. The grandmother, trying to rescue the boy who was asleep in the bedroom upstairs, was overcome by smoke and died in the fire. This frontier city didn't have much of a fire department. A crowd gathered around the house and they heard the small boy crying out for help. The lower floor was a wall of flames and no one seemed to know what to do. Suddenly, a man pushed through the crowd and began to climb the iron drainage pipe which ran up to the roof. The pipe was hot from the fire, but he made it to the second floor

window. The man crawled through the window and located the boy. With the crowd cheering encouragement, the man climbed back down the hot iron pipe with the boy on his back, clinging to the man's neck.

A few weeks later, a public meeting was held to determine in whose custody the boy would be placed, since he had no remaining family. Each person wanting the child would be allowed to make a brief statement. The first man said, "I have a farm and would give the boy a good home. He would grow up on the farm, learn a trade, and the value of hard work."

The second person to speak was a local school teacher. She said, "I am a school teacher and I would see to it that he received a good education." Finally, the banker said, "Mrs. Morton and I would be able to give the boy a fine home and a fine education. We would like him to come and live with us." The presiding officer looked around and asked, "Is there anyone else who would like to say anything?" From the back row, a man rose and said, "These other people may be able to offer some things I can't. All I can offer is my love." Then, he slowly removed his hands from his coat pockets. A gasp went up from the crowd because his hands were scarred terribly from climbing up and down the hot pipe. The boy recognized the man as the one who had saved his life and ran into his waiting arms.

The farmer, teacher, and the banker simply sat down. Everyone knew what the decision would be. The scarred hands proved that this man had given more than all the others. The scarred hands spoke of his love for the boy.

Today, there are many things which are vying for our love and attention. Young and old alike are challenged by the call of money, pleasure, fame and a host of other interests. But may we not forget that down the corridors of time walks one who, by merely stretching out his hands, reminds us that he suffered because of his love for us, and that he calls us to act on our faith. Those hands were pierced by nails. Those hands were the familiar sign of love and life to the disciples. Those hands bestowed peace.

Yes, Thomas was full of doubts about the resurrection when he heard the stories of the other disciples. His mind was closed to the unseen possibilities of a living Lord until he was confronted with the living, risen Christ. Jesus looked at Thomas and said, "Thomas, if it's proof that you want, look at my hands, touch the wounds and stop your doubting."

Thomas looked at the hands and knew that action was needed. Instead of touching the wounds, Thomas professed, "My Lord and my God." Sometimes we have to discard your doubts and act on faith. We may have some lingering doubts. We may have some unanswered questions. There may be some things which will remain a mystery. But, like Thomas, we realize that the risen Christ transcends our doubts and Christ calls us to respond by witnessing to the peace we have received, the truths that replaced doubts, and the love that we received and must share.

Consider again Jesus' hands. How will you offer those hands to our broken world this week?