



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Second Sunday of Easter

April 23, 2017

“He Showed Them His Hands”

(John 20:19-21)

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“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands” (John 20:19-21).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

After each service, I stand at the back of the sanctuary to greet and shake hands. Such a collection of hands we have at Good Shepherd! Some of the hands around here have oil and grease in the lattice work of the skin. Their owners have lamented that no amount of scrubbing will ever cleanse their hands. The hands of our white collar workers are clean and soft . . . too soft, some of them think. I shake hands of women whose nails receive professional attention. She might be followed by an eight-year-old who worked his nails over like a cob of corn. Some hands are reliably cold; they come out at the end of the service just a degree or two warmer than the steering wheel. When I get down and hold my hand out to a two or three year old girl, as often as not it's the left hand that is placed in my own. It makes me think of a princess stepping out of her chariot. A few of you have a very strong hand shake. I know who you are now and am ready for you. A number have hands that are crippled by painful arthritis. I try to be gentle; remind me if I'm not. The hands of infants are often held out to me by mom or dad, and so I shake a plump, little fist. We have a menagerie of hands, and they reveal a surprising amount of information about us.

In our Gospel lesson, when Jesus appears in the upper room, the first thing he does is say, "Peace be with you." The next thing he does is show them his hands. His hands reveal a lot about him . . . and us. You who think of sin but lightly, take a look at his hands. Apparently your sin and mine is a big deal, at least to God. Apparently he made himself culpable for your sin and mine. Apparently God simply could not turn a blind eye to sin, but addressed it head on. So he shows them his hands.

But let's back up a few seconds. When Jesus first

appears in that room, I'm not so sure his disciples are happy to see him again. Remember in what spectacular fashion they failed him on that Thursday and Friday? They betrayed him, denied him and abandoned him, couldn't even stay awake when he needed them. Peter, with peacock feathers aplomb announced he would sooner die with Jesus than deny him. Taking his lead the other disciples said they would do the same. And yet, where were they all when Jesus stood before Pilate? Where were they when the chief priests were working up the crowd to shout "Crucify him!"? Where was their bravado then?

So when Jesus suddenly appears before them now, I'm not so sure they're glad to see him. I suspect they're ashamed, fearful even. At the very least they can expect a tongue lashing. But what does he say? He says, "Peace be with you!" "Peace be with you" was a normal Hebrew greeting, but not on that day. On that day and to those men, it was an absolution. On that day, this ordinary Hebrew greeting is loaded with the freight of forgiveness. In spite of their failures, Jesus says, "Peace be with you!" and it is the sound of grace on their ears.

Then he shows them those hands, a sign of grace to their eyes. That is, he shows them the cost of absolution, the price at which he bought their peace. After those words and that sign, now they are "glad", the text says (v. 20). It's probably one of those classic understatements. "Thrilled" more likely, and "relieved". It's going to be ok. God's Son, risen from the dead, is with them again and loves them.

One of the common themes running along in Scripture is that there is both an attraction and repulsion toward God, even among his own people. We see this tension within Jesus' own disciples. They love him. They've have been drawn to follow him. But at the same time, they're afraid of him.

We see this tension right from the first chapters of Genesis. Remember how Adam and Eve tried to create a little distance between themselves and God, hiding from him in the some bushes? Remember how the people of Israel

later requested that the Lord maintain some distance, because he was entirely too holy and they were entirely too sinful and they knew that when the holy mingles with the sinful it's like fire mingling with chaff. Remember how the psalmist asked, "Where can I go from your Spirit, Lord? Where can I flee from your presence?" (Ps. 139). And remember in Luke 5 when the Lord told his disciples where to cast their nets and how they pulled up a huge haul of fish? And of all things, Peter says, "Stay away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man."

There is, apparently, a compelling attraction to God, his wisdom, power and grace, but also a fear in his presence, a caution, a sense of not wanting to get too close, a desire to keep God at arm's length.

I'm thinking now of how Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in and will dine with him." But not everyone, then or now, is inclined to open the door to him. After all, he might come in and tell you to change some things about yourself, things you don't want to change.

When God comes close to us, we become aware of our sin. When we get close to the humanity of Jesus, suddenly our own humanity doesn't seem so good.

What a blessing then, that the first words out of his mouth in that room to those men are words of absolution, "Peace be with you." And then the hands, as if to say, "this death wasn't just an accident, you know. It was for you."

Each of us has had times in our lives, chapters when we have failed the Lord in spectacular fashion, in what we did and did not do, what we said and did not say. In fact, if we diligently examine ourselves as Scripture urges us to do, we would recognize moments within each day when we have failed the Lord in thought, word and deed. If you don't agree, I'm afraid you have a major blind spot to the human condition and the condition of the world. If you don't agree, if you don't feel a deep thirst for forgiveness, Luther would suggest you put your hand on your bosom to see if you still have flesh and blood. He would also have you look around to see whether you are still in the world.

However, if you examine your heart and conscience carefully, your words and actions and thoughts in light of God's commandments, you will find there's a poor, miserable sinner hiding behind locked doors, for fear of others but also for fear of God.

But Jesus comes to you today and says, "Peace be with you." He says that to you today through his called ministers whom he has tasked with the responsibility of absolving the repentant. And in this text today he shows us his hands again, as if to say this death wasn't just an accident, and it isn't just for others. It is also for you.

Look at his hands! They bear the marks of his death, but now also the evidence of his resurrection. Look at his hands. He's not shaking a fist at you. He's not jabbing a condemning finger into your chest. Nor is he keeping you at arm's length. No, he's showing us his hands in absolution and in peace.

Part of our task today is just to receive the good news of this text, to see and hear the crucified and risen Lord say to us, "Peace be with you." Part of our task also is to share that peace with the world, more specifically with the people in your life. For his death wasn't just for his early disciples, nor is it just for you. It's also for those around you. Amen.

