

MARK 1:29-45 - "THE HANDS OF JESUS"

HANDS ARE A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE HUMAN ANATOMY, AND ONE WE PERHAPS OFTEN TAKE FOR GRANTED. WE USE OUR HANDS TO GRASP AND HOLD ONTO THINGS, TO GREET ONE ANOTHER WITH A WAVE OR A SHAKE.

HANDS CAN BE INSTRUMENTS OF PAIN OR COMFORT, USED IN ANGER OR LOVE. AND WE CAN EVEN TALK WITH OUR HANDS.

WE HAVE MANY SAYINGS ABOUT HANDS LIKE: GIVE ME A HAND UP, ALL HANDS ON DECK, GAIN THE UPPER HAND, HAVING A FREE HAND. THE LIST GOES ON AND ON.

THEN THERE ARE STORIES IN THE BIBLE ABOUT HUMAN HANDS BESTOWING A BLESSING OR GIVING SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT.

SCRIPTURE ALSO SPEAKS OFTEN ABOUT GOD HOLDING OR LEADING HIS PEOPLE BY HIS HAND.

FOR EXAMPLE: PSALM 139:10 "EVEN THERE YOUR HAND SHALL LEAD ME, AND YOUR RIGHT HAND SHALL HOLD ME FAST."

AND JESUS SAID IN JOHN 10:28 ABOUT HIS SHEEP: "I GIVE THEM ETERNAL LIFE, AND THEY WILL NEVER PERISH, AND NO ONE CAN SNATCH THEM OUT OF MY HAND."

THIS LEADS US TO THINKING ABOUT THE HANDS OF JESUS, AS A METAPHOR FOR THE WILL AND STRENGTH OF GOD.

HIS HANDS WELCOME US, OFFERING AN INVITATION TO US TO PLACE OUR HANDS, OUR LIFE IN HIS AND BE LEAD BY HIM.

THERE IS AN OLD COUNTRY SONG ABOUT SEEING JESUS THIS WAY, MADE FAMOUS BY JOHNNY CASH. THE CHORUS SAYS:

"PUT YOUR HAND IN THE HAND OF THE MAN WHO STILLED THE WATER. PUT YOUR HAND IN THE HAND OF THE MAN WHO CALMED THE SEA.

TAKE A LOOK AT YOURSELF AND YOU WILL LOOK AT OTHERS DIFFERENTLY, PUT YOUR HAND IN THE HAND OF THE MAN FROM GALILEE."

HERE, BEING LEAD BY THE HAND OF CHRIST MEANS BEING CHANGED BY HIM. TO PUT ONE'S HAND IN THE HAND OF JESUS ALSO MEANS TO FOLLOW HIM EVERY DAY.

THERE ARE MANY MORE WAYS TO DESCRIBE THE HANDS OF JESUS, SPECIFICALLY TO THINK ABOUT HIS ACTUAL HUMAN HANDS.

PHYSICALLY, WE MAY IMAGINE THEY WERE STRONG AND CALLOUSED BY MANUAL LABOR, AND BROWN LIKE MOST IN PALESTINE.

JESUS' HANDS COULD HOLD A WHIP TO CHASE MONEY CHANGERS OUT OF THE TEMPLE, AND YET COULD BE GENTLE TO WELCOME LITTLE CHILDREN.

WE OFTEN THINK OF THE HANDS OF JESUS NAILED TO THE CROSS, AND CARRYING THE SCARS OF CRUCIFIXION ON HIS RESURRECTED BODY.

THERE ARE TWO MORE IMAGES OF THE HANDS OF JESUS FOUND IN TODAY'S GOSPEL READING WE WILL FOCUS ON TODAY.

THEY ARE THE HANDS OF JESUS IN PRAYER AND HIS HEALING HANDS.

WE ALREADY WERE REMINDED LAST WEEK THAT JESUS COULD AND DID HEAL WITH ONLY THE COMMAND OF HIS VOICE.

AND YET THERE ARE MANY STORIES IN THE GOSPELS THAT SPEAK ABOUT JESUS TOUCHING SOMEONE WHEN HE HEALED OR RAISED THEM FROM THE DEAD.

THE TOUCH IN THESE INSTANCES WAS NOT TO HEAL THE ALIMENT OR INJURY, BUT WAS A SIGN OF LOVE, OF CARING, AND A RECOGNITION OF THE HUMAN NEED FOR PHYSICAL CONTACT.

THE STORY IN TODAY'S READING FROM MARK BEGINS ON THE SAME DAY JESUS HEALED A MAN IN THE SYNAGOGUE ON THE SABBATH.

IT WAS AFTER THE SERVICE JESUS WENT TO PETER'S HOME AND LEARNED HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW WAS IN BED WITH A HIGH FEVER.

MARK DESCRIBES HOW JESUS HEALED HER SAYING: "HE CAME AND TOOK HER BY THE HAND AND LIFTED HER UP. THEN THE FEVER LEFT HER, AND SHE BEGAN TO SERVE HIM."

THERE IS MUCH MORE TO THIS THAN A SIMPLE HEALING. INDEED, BY TAKING HER HAND JESUS GAVE HER NOT ONLY HEALING, BUT RENEWED STRENGTH, AS WELL.

SHE WENT FROM BEING TOO WEAK TO GET OUT OF BED TO BEING STRONG ENOUGH TO PERFORM HER DAILY DUTIES.

BY HIS TOUCH JESUS ALSO CONNECTED TO HER IN A PERSONAL WAY-DRAWING HER UP AND ENABLING HER TO SERVE HIM.

THIS PARTICULAR HEALING CAN BE SEEN AS A METAPHOR FOR HOW JESUS TAKES US BY THE HAND- HE SPIRITUALLY, HEALS US FROM OUR SIN AND ENABLES US TO SERVE HIM.

OF COURSE IMPLIED IN THIS IS OUR CHOICE TO DO SO OR NOT. PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW SHOWED HER GRATITUDE BY SERVING JESUS.

THIS PART OF THE STORY CHALLENGES US TO CONSIDER HOW GRATEFUL WE ARE FOR CHRIST'S DELIVERANCE? ARE WE GRATEFUL ENOUGH TO SERVE HIM IN OUR OWN LIVES?

TRULY, IN FORGIVING US OF OUR SIN, JESUS NOT ONLY LIFTS US UP FROM A HOLE WE CAN NEVER CLIMB OUT OF ON OUR OWN, HE ALSO OFFERS US DIRECTION AND NEW LIFE.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO PUT OUR HAND IN THE HAND OF THE MAN FROM GALILEE IS THE FIRST STEP IN THIS NEW LIFE, AND STRIVING TO FOLLOW HIM IS THE SECOND.

WE COME NOW TO THE SECOND HEALING TOUCH JESUS OFFERED, WHICH WAS TO A MAN WITH LEPROSY

THE DISEASE OF LEPROSY WAS SO SERIOUS SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL DISTANCING, EVEN FROM THOSE YOU LIVED WITH, WAS ISSUED BY THE COMMAND OF GOD FOR ANYONE WITH THE CONDITION.

THIS WAS BECAUSE AT THE TIME IT WAS VERY CONTAGIOUS AND THE PROGNOSIS FOR THOSE WITH TRUE LEPROSY WAS MUCH SUFFERING AND EVENTUAL DEATH.

IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT THIS, LIKE OTHER DISEASES, WAS USUALLY VIEWED AT THAT TIME AS PUNISHMENT FROM GOD.

THUS THE PERSON WITH LEPROSY THAT WENT UNCURED WAS PERMANENTLY SEPARATED FROM FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND EVEN THE SYNAGOGUE AND TEMPLE.

AND WHENEVER THEY WENT FORTH FROM WHEREVER THEY LEPERS FOUND SHELTER, THEY WERE REQUIRED TO CALL OUT "UNCLEAN" TO ANYONE THEY SAW-TO KEEP PEOPLE AWAY FROM THEM.

THE WORDS "CLEAN" AND "UNCLEAN" IN THE BIBLE WERE OFTEN USED AS METAPHORS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SIN.

FOR EXAMPLE IN ISAIAH 6:5 THE PROPHET PROCLAIMS HIS AND HIS PEOPLE'S SINFULNESS BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD, SAYING:

"WOE IS ME! I AM LOST, FOR I AM A MAN OF UNCLEAN LIPS, AND I LIVE AMONG A PEOPLE OF UNCLEAN LIPS."

GOD THEN SENT AN ANGEL TO CLEANSE THE PROPHET SO HE WOULD BE FREE TO ANSWER GOD'S CALL TO SERVICE.

I SHARE ALL OF THIS BECAUSE THE REQUEST THE LEPER MADE TO JESUS, WAS FOR INNER CLEANSING AS WELL AS FOR PHYSICAL HEALING.

HE TOLD THE SAVIOR, "IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN."

IMPLIED IN THIS STATEMENT WAS THE MAN'S FEAR JESUS MIGHT NOT BE WILLING, BECAUSE LEPROSY WAS ASSOCIATED WITH SINFULNESS.

JESUS, AS WE HEARD IN THE READING WAS NOT PUT OFF EITHER BY THE DISEASE, OR BY THE MAN BEING A SINNER. AFTER ALL EVERYONE BUT JESUS IS A SINNER.

THEREFORE, IT WAS TO SHOW THE DEGREE OF HIS WILLINGNESS TO HEAL AND RESTORE THE MAN THAT PROMPTED JESUS TO REACH OUT AND TOUCH HIM.

JESUS, YOU SEE, HAD NO FEAR EITHER OF THE DISEASE OR THE SIN ASSOCIATED WITH IT.

HE HEALED THE PHYSICAL, CLEANSED THE SPIRITUAL, AND ENABLED THE MAN TO BE RESTORED TO HIS FAMILY, TO SOCIETY, AND TO HIS FAITH COMMUNITY.

HERE THE TOUCH OF THE MASTER'S HAND WAS A TOUCH FILLED WITH COMPASSION, LOVE, AND THE POWER OF GOD.

HIS TOUCH CAN DO THE SAME FOR US EVERY TIME WE PUT OUR HAND IN HIS HAND AND CONFESS OUR SIN WITH A DESIRE TO BE RESTORED.

THE GOOD NEWS FOR US IS WE DO NOT NEED THE PHYSICAL PRESENCE OF JESUS WITH US FOR THIS TO HAPPEN.

AND THE BETTER NEWS IS THAT THIS RESTORATION OF OUR RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, OURSELVES, AND ONE ANOTHER IS NOT A ONETIME OCCURRENCE.

TIME AND TIME AGAIN, CHRIST'S DIVINE LOVE AND HEALING TOUCH REACHES OUT TO CLEANSE OUR HEARTS AND MINDS AND SOULS.

THIS IS THE LASTING GIFT HE KEEPS GIVING UNTIL WE NO LONGER NEED TO BE FORGIVEN BECAUSE WE ARE UNITED WITH HIM IN HEAVEN OR JESUS HAS RETURNED TO EARTH.

THIS REMINDS ME OF THE CHORUS OF ANOTHER OLD SONG: "LOVE LIFTED ME, LOVE LIFTED ME. WHEN NOTHING ELSE COULD HELP, LOVE LIFTED ME."

TIME AND TIME AGAIN THE BIBLE TELLS US IT IS DUE TO GOD'S LOVE THAT WE ARE FORGIVEN THROUGH JESUS.

AND AN IMPORTANT PART OF THIS BIBLICAL TEACHING IS GOD'S INVITATION TO US TO RECOGNIZE OUR NEED FOR CLEANSING SO WE WILL TAKE HOLD OF THE HAND OF JESUS.

BUT THERE IS STILL MORE INSIGHT WE CAN GAIN FROM THINKING ABOUT THE HANDS OF JESUS.

IT IS FOUND IN ANOTHER PART OF TODAY'S GOSPEL STORY, SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED BETWEEN THE HEALING OF PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW AND THAT OF THE LEPER.

THE SAME EVENING OF THE HEALING IN THE SYNAGOGUE AND THE HEALING IN PETER'S HOUSE, NEWS ABOUT JESUS HAD REACHED THE WHOLE COMMUNITY.

JESUS SOON HAD HIS HANDS FULL WITH PEOPLE SEEKING TO BE HEALED BY HIM.

WE DO NOT KNOW EXACTLY HOW LATE INTO THE NIGHT IT WENT, BUT WE ARE TOLD THAT EARLY IN THE MORNING JESUS FOUND A PLACE OUT OF THE SIGHT OF EVERYONE.

IT IS THERE WHEN HE WAS ALONE WITH HIS FATHER THAT THE HEALING HANDS OF JESUS BECAME HANDS CLASPED IN PRAYER.

YES, THE SAVIOR TOOK TIME AWAY FROM OTHERS TO COMMUNE IN PRIVATE WITH HIS FATHER.

THIS WAS NO SMALL THING, BECAUSE THE NEED FOR HIM AS A HEALER WAS SO GREAT, AND YET HIS MISSION WAS TO DO MORE THAN STAY PUT AND SET UP SHOP AS A HEALER.

THUS WHEN THE DISCIPLES FOUND JESUS AND BID HIM TO RETURN TO TOWN, HE TOLD THEM IT WAS TIME TO MOVE ON.

AND OF COURSE, IF JESUS HAD NOT DONE SO, THE LEPER WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN HEALED, AND JESUS' TEACHING MINISTRY WOULD HAVE BEEN USURPED BY HIS HEALING.

WE NEED TO REMEMBER THE MIRACLES JESUS DID WERE DONE TO VERIFY THE TRUTH OF HIS WORDS ABOUT GOD AND HIS OWN AUTHORITY.

THIS REMINDS US HOW NECESSARY PRAYER WAS FOR JESUS. AND IF HE NEEDED TO PRAY, WE CAN BE SURE WE ALSO NEED TO FREQUENTLY PRAY FOR DIRECTION AS WELL.

FURTHERMORE, WE CAN BE SURE THAT GOD IS WILLING TO LISTEN, TO FORGIVE, AND TO GUIDE US, IF WE ARE WILLING TO PUT OUR HAND IN HIS.

INDEED THE SAVIOR PROMISED TO BE WITH US ALWAYS, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT ABIDES WITHIN ALL WHO RECEIVE JESUS INTO THEIR LIVES, PUTTING THEIR HAND IN HIS.

THIS GIVES US THE ASSURANCE THAT WE CAN PRAY IN CONFIDENCE THAT GOD WILL HEAR US.

FOR EVEN WHEN DO NOT GET THE ANSWER WE SEEK, THE BIBLE AFFIRMS GOD WILL KEEP US IN HIS POWERFUL HANDS.

LET US THEREFORE GIVE THANKS FOR: THE STRONG AND GENTLE, THE WELCOMING AND GUIDING, AND THE HEALING AND PRAYERFUL HANDS OF JESUS.

I CLOSE NOW WITH A PRAYER ABOUT BEING IN CHRIST'S HANDS, WRITTEN BY A MAN NAMED KEN PILCHER, JR.

LET US PRAY:

“LORD JESUS, HERE I AM. I TRUST IN YOU. YOU ARE MY GOD. MY LIFE IS IN YOUR HANDS. YOU KNOW MY HEART. YOU KNOW MY CARES. YOU KNOW MY WORRIES. YOU KNOW THE THINGS THAT MAKE ME AFRAID. LORD JESUS, WITH YOUR MIGHTY HANDS, YOU SUPPLY MY NEEDS. AS YOU FED THE THOUSANDS, HEALED THE SICK, CALMED THE STORM, AND RAISED THE DEAD, SO KEEP ME, O LORD, MY GOD IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND.” AMEN

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