

Palm Sunday Talk

Sunday April 5th, 2020

Most of us have two of them... they come in various sizes and conditions – we use them every day to perform all sorts of jobs.

Indeed, if we ever injure one – we suddenly find we can't do very much very easily.

Anyone like to guess what I'm talking about?

Hands.

Take a look at your hands. If you are with someone right now, compare your hand with theirs. Is it bigger? Is it smaller? Is it smoother? Has it got wrinkles? And, most relevant perhaps for these days of careful hand washing - are your hands sore like mine from all the alcohol gel we use?

Hands can perhaps say a lot about what we do in our lives, the sort of job we have and the exposure our hands have to rough materials or the elements.

No two hands are the same – we all have different fingerprints.

Even the fingerprints of identical twins are not exactly the same.

The patterns of our fingerprints remain the same throughout our lives.

We can imagine at the moment just how many caring, loving and gentle hands are working with very poorly people who the corona virus – millions of pairs of hands trying to bring relief and healing across the world in all sorts of ways.

We give profound thanks for all healing hands today.

We can only imagine what Jesus' hands looked and felt like.

He was a carpenter by trade, so his hands must have been strong, as one hymn has it, at the plane and the lathe.

He would have turned wood with much love and skill and just as his hands fashioned wood, his hands also changed lives.

When we think about his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, we think of a man who could sit on an animal never ridden before, keep it calm as people shouted all around it and control it as people waved palm branches. He must have had a wonderful pair of hands.

There are many stories in the bible where Jesus uses his hands to reach out to the world.

We read in the gospels of many instances when he would lay his hands on sick people and through his hands came God's healing power. He must have comforted countless numbers of people simply by just holding their hand and being beside them.

His hands also provided for people's needs – as when he turned water into wine at a wedding and fed 5,000 by multiplying the loaves and the fishes.

Then again, he used his hands in very different ways when, after

arriving in Jerusalem, he went to the temple and drove out the moneylenders who were cheating people and overthrew their tables.

So, we've thought about Jesus' hands as a carpenter, a healer, a provider, someone also who challenged people.

On this Palm Sunday, the Sunday before his crucifixion, we have him riding into Jerusalem, his hands firmly controlling the young donkey.

Four days later – we find him using his hands again in a very special way. On the Thursday of what we call Holy Week, he shared a last meal with his friends – breaking bread with his hands and holding up a cup of wine for God's blessing. But before those actions he washed his disciples' feet with his own hands, showing he was their servant, someone who had come to serve others.

Then – the next day – Good Friday..... By this time Jesus' enemies has captured him and sent him before the Roman Governor Pilate and the High Priest Caiaphas. The decision was made to kill him by crucifixion – and so these remarkable hands which had healed, served and fed people were now tied to a cross and nailed down in mockery and hate.

It's hard to imagine anyone's hands nailed to a piece of wood. We don't naturally want to think about anything so awful.

But Jesus was prepared to suffer in this way for us. Some things in life are very hard to understand. But the picture of Jesus with the nails through his hands tells us that Jesus was willing to give up his life to show us how much God longs to draw close to us and for us to be at peace with him.

If all that happened to Jesus was his crucifixion and that had been the end – then to be sure we wouldn't be meeting together via the internet today.

There would be no Christian faith. No followers of Christ.

We lead towards the events of Good Friday knowing that although Jesus went through the most awful suffering – that was not the end of the story.

The hands that had been crucified did not stay dead and lifeless. Jesus was to be raised to new life in the power of God. What an enduring image we have of his resurrection appearances when his disciples see him again- alive and victorious over death... yet with the imprint of the nails still in hands.

Hands are wonderful things. I hope you look after yours and they are not too sore at the moment.

And as we remember the events of Holy Week and Easter this year, let us always remember that God holds us in the palm of his hand – in life, in death and into eternity.

Let us pray for all those who are selflessly giving up their time, their expertise and the precious gift of touch in any setting across our earth where people desperately need compassion and healing. Amen