

Two Hands

I Corinthians 1:3-9; Luke 10:38-42

Reign of Christ Sunday, (Nov. 20) 2022

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Today's Gospel story from Luke 10 sounds like a Thanksgiving Day story to me. Martha invites Jesus to dinner with her and her sister Mary. Jesus shows up and sits in the living room (maybe their brother Lazarus was in another room watching football on TV) and sister Mary makes conversation with him and begins to sit and listen to his teaching, hanging on every word. Meanwhile, sister Martha is in the kitchen multitasking: cooking, pans and dishes are clattering, you can hear the water in the sink turn on and then off, the oven door slams a couple of times, and we hear Martha doing a lot of sighing and mumbling under her breath. Finally, we hear her let out shout of pain and maybe a curse word from burning herself on a hot casserole dish and in frustration she blurts out, "Jesus, will you tell my sister to come in here and help?! I've got my hands full and need some help!"

Jesus responds, "Martha, Martha take a deep breath. You're distracted and frustrated by many things when there is only one most essential thing to do. Mary has chosen to do this one most essential thing." And I wonder if he added, "Come on in here. Join us and sit awhile and listen. And in a bit, all three of us will prepare dinner and I'll do the dishes afterwards" (Luke 10:38-42).

Perhaps St. Augustine can help us get a sense of what's going on here. Early in the fifth century, Augustine wrote about the difference between things we "use" (Latin "uti") and things we "enjoy" (Latin "frui"). We *enjoy* things for their own sake in contrast to *using* some things for some further end. For example, we *use* a spoon, but we *enjoy* food. And a spoon is rightly used when it is used in service for

its proper object – the enjoyment of food. We abuse and misuse when we get these mixed up. If the spoon becomes the object of focus, we are missing the point of spoons. Likewise, when we use food, just gobble it down while rushing to something else, we are not enjoying it and instead we are abusing it. Augustine said whatever we use is rightly used when it is used as God intends (see Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book 1, Chap. 3 and 4).

For Augustine, more than anything else, we enjoy God. Reflecting this, the Scottish Presbyterians in 1647 wrote the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the first question was: “What is the chief end of man? The answer was: Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

In our Luke Thanksgiving story in the home of Mary and Martha, Mary is enjoying Christ. Meanwhile, Martha is distracted. The Living God Incarnate is sitting on her couch and she is in the kitchen with a hot skillet in one hand and a dishtowel and cup in the other, getting frustrated. Getting a meal together to enjoy with Jesus would be considered by Augustine as proper and good but in the hustle and the bustle and frustration, she has become distracted and lost the point. The point being to glorify and enjoy Christ. Martha is misusing while Mary is enjoying.

To help us further, I want you to do something for me this morning. It’s a suggestion from my friend, Sam Wells, the rector at St. Martins in the Fields Church in London. I’d like for you to hold both of your hands in front of you, palms upward, with the little finger of each hand just touching. As you look at your hands, begin to think about the hands of God the Creator, the first person of the Trinity, who made all things including the complexity and care of making your hands. At the same time, it was the nail-scarred hands of Christ the Redeemer, the second person of the Trinity, who was crucified as he showed us how much God

loves us. And look at your two hands and think about the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit's hands are the ones you are looking at right now. Wells says that looking at and using our two hands like this gives us an idea of what it means to be Christian (from Sam Wells, *Be Not Afraid*, p. 200). You can put your hands down now.

I wonder how often we use both hands. I remember as a kid being taught in both baseball and football to use two hands to catch the ball. We thought it was cool to try to one-hand it; to casually catch a deep fly ball one-handed was a way to look good, except that we usually dropped the ball. The coaches would yell, "Both hands!" Same in football – over and over again, we were drilled in catching the football with both hands. The coach would yell, "Childress! Use two hands! Two hands! Look at the ball – focus – and look the ball into both hands." Of course, if we didn't do as he said, soon we would be running wind sprints up and down the field until we understood what he was saying.

Doing things one-handed seems natural in our multi-tasking world. We catch the ball one-handed because we know we need to throw the ball with the other or we're already thinking about how we're going to run with the ball before we catch it.

We drive one-handed. Automatic transmissions, power steering, and more in our cars allow us to drive one-handed so we can multitask. We have one hand free to talk on the phone, program the GPS, and eat fast-food (which is a one-handed food), while listening to music or podcasts. And with the development of self-driving cars, we can do even more tasks at one time!

I remember Jane and I were in my old pickup backing out of Susan Rushing's driveway and I was trying to one-hand it. We almost backed into Cindy

Bertin's mailbox, because using one hand was not enough to properly turn that old pickup, which does not have power steering. It takes two hands.

When I was young, I was driving a car in Germany on the autobahn and noticed there was no radio or sound system. I later asked someone about it, and they said, "In Germany, on the autobahn, when going upwards of 160 kmph (100 mph) you need to concentrate on one thing: driving. No distractions, no drinking coffee, no listening to music. Just put on your driving gloves, put both hands on the wheel and drive."

We text and talk and watch TV and look at a computer all at the same, one hand flying from one thing to another while the other hand does something else.

It makes me wonder what things make us interrupt our one-handed culture and our one-handed habits. What things does it take two hands? When we dedicate a baby, we use two hands. It is not a one-handed job. When the doctor hands a newborn to the mother, I'm sure the doctor uses two hands. And when the mother holds her newborn for the first time, I bet she uses two hands.

The greatest gifts of God take two hands. And we get into trouble when we try to one-hand them. Living the life God gives us takes two hands. It takes time. It takes joy and real joy takes time. Raising a child takes time. Friendship takes two hands. To be the church with one another is a two-handed job.

After church, when we're standing at the back drinking coffee, kids are running by, there's lots of noise and distraction. And in my case, I often have several of you coming up to me commenting on the sermon, telling me about a medical procedure you're going to have, a crisis with a family member, asking about my own health, inviting me for coffee later in the week, reminding me of a

meeting, commenting on local, state, or national politics, telling me about an interesting book you're reading or a new TV series streaming on Netflix, asking me about where I want to eat lunch. And during all this, someone says to me, "Two years ago this Tuesday, my husband died." The art of being a pastor and the art of being a good church member, is to enjoy the conversation. Hear me clearly. To enjoy does not mean that it is lighthearted. To enjoy means it takes two hands. It means to fully engage and pay attention with one's mind and one's heart. It means that I don't say, "My, how time flies. What do you think the Board of Regents will decide about SFA's affiliation next week?" as I move over to refill my coffee cup. It means to stop, focus, notice, empathize, and respond with something like, "Does it still break your heart?" and "Yes, I miss him, too," and then listen. That's called being church to one another.

To enjoy each other takes two hands. To enjoy God takes two hands because knowing God and to know each other, takes time – because it takes longer to assimilate, know, and enjoy than when we grab with one hand. We enjoy God means we pay attention, put aside distractions, and enter into. To know and enjoy God is a life-long journey and it takes all of who we are.

When we receive the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, it takes two hands. When we pray, we put two hands together. When we receive the benediction before going out into the world, we hold on with both hands.

Next Sunday, we begin Advent, and Advent always takes two hands. Advent involves difficult biblical texts asking us challenging questions, calling us to deep prayer and quiet reflection, all while our surrounding culture overwhelms us with Christmas jingles, consumerism, and frenzied activity. This coming Friday is the craziest day of consumerism of the year. To do Advent will take two hands. It will

take effort and time and engagement, so we can enjoy God with our minds and hearts and bodies.

We can enjoy God because God enjoys us. God does not *use* us. God *enjoys* us. We're not a consumer good God tosses into the cart with one hand while grabbing another item from the shelves with the other. On the contrary, the whole life of the living God is to be in relationship with us, to enjoy us. God is always fully engaged with all of God's creation, including us. The healing, hope, and salvation of creation and of our lives is about enjoyment in the truest and deepest sense – God enjoying us and us enjoying God.

This week our own Christina Banchs-McRae was able to attend the Pastors' Convocation at S.M.U.'s Perkins School of Theology, and she met and heard my friend Norman Wirzba, who teaches at Duke Divinity School. Norman likes to point out the close etymological kinship between "thinking" and "thanking?" Only one letter makes the words different. In some traditional societies the two words are related to each other. The Old English word for "thought" was *thanc* which referred to the innermost person's heart that is always reaching out to connect with the wider world. True thought is always this heartfelt connection that joins us to others and to the world. To think is to pay attention, to stop, to slow down, to take the time to notice our connection. Thinking leads to enjoying. Thinking leads to thanking.

Enjoy this week, especially on Thanksgiving Day. Take the time to think about the food, think about each other, and think about God and God's many gifts. Then give thanks. Thank someone for their friendship. Thank someone for their love. And most especially, thank God.

As you well know, for the past year weddings have been the center of my

attention. A little over a year ago, Emily and Nick were married. A month ago, Callie and Ivory were married. And both marriages prompted memories of when Jane and I were married. I remember the day Jane and I got married took all day. The rehearsal the evening before, then the dinner, followed by a party and then up for an early morning breakfast with all her extended family followed by getting ready, then up to the church for pictures. The ceremony itself took a good hour and included three congregations and two preachers. Then the reception there at the church followed by dinner at a very nice restaurant for the immediate family, and then another party, mainly for younger people, in a Catholic church fellowship hall where we could dance. It was an all-day event and half of the night.

The key moment was in the ceremony when the minister had us turn and face one another fully and completely, take each other hands, both hands, and then the minister wrapped his stole around our clasped hands with the newly placed rings on them, and prayed a prayer of blessing. Then we kissed and embraced. It took two hands. Indeed, it took more – it took everything in me.

It still does. And I give thanks.

May it be so with all of us.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God, Mother of us all. Amen.