

Today is World Communion Sunday when Christians all over the world from different communities, different denominations and different cultures all gather to celebrate and remember the Lord's Supper. This day reminds us that no matter how different we are and that in spite of the different ways we worship, we all still worship and believe in the same God; His Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior; and in the Holy Spirit. We are united in this common belief, and today we affirm it. Communion is always special, but especially on this Sunday.

As you study the life of Jesus in the gospels, you find that He was always willing to sit down and break bread with anyone. Many of His sayings that we have today were shared around the dinner table. This morning as we remember and celebrate that special meal on the night before Jesus died on the cross, I would like for us to look at another communion meal that He shared with two people in Emmaus following the Resurrection. Our scripture text is taken from the twentieth-four chapter of the Gospel of Luke, verses 13 through 35.

Read Luke 24:13-35

It is the evening of the first Sunday, the Day of Resurrection. Two discouraged, downhearted followers are returning home after an eventful day in Jerusalem. The Apostle Luke only names one of them; we don't know if the other person is another man or the man's wife. They are walking along into the setting sun discussing the events of the day when all of sudden Jesus walks up and joins in their conversation. For some reason they don't recognize that it is Jesus and are amazed that He does not know what has happened over the past few days.

As they walked along the roadway, Jesus enlightens them into the meaning of the Scriptures and explains why certain things had to happen as they did. Can you imagine that, the Son of God explaining how the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in His death and resurrection. The conversation is so inspiring that time flies and before they know it they are at their home in Emmaus. Jesus acts as if He is going on down the road, but they invite Him in for supper. As they prepare to eat, Jesus assumes the role of the host and follows the pattern that He used when He fed the 5,000 and at the Lord's Supper; He took the bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to them. Immediately their eyes were opened and they recognized the Lord; then He suddenly disappeared.

After all that time walking with Jesus on the road, what finally opened their eyes? I believe it was seeing His hands as He broke the bread. So this morning as we celebrate communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world, I would like for us to focus on the hands of Jesus, those precious nail scarred hands that still reach out to you and me today and every day.

In preparation for this message, I went over the four gospels looking for those times when Jesus touched someone. While some of the incidents are recorded in more than one gospel, I found twenty-one separate times when the hands of Jesus are mentioned. There may be more, but these present an interesting insight into the ministry and love of our Lord and Savior. Of course, we remember the stories of Jesus healing the sick, holding and blessing the little children, and breaking the bread at the Lord's Supper. But let's look at a few more and see what we can learn about the hands of Jesus.

Jesus' hands were always reaching out to those in need. All four gospels record Jesus feeding the 5,000. The fourteenth chapter of Matthew tells us that when Jesus saw the crowd, He had compassion for them. In Luke 13 Jesus touched a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years with a bent back, unable to straighten up; immediately she was healed. In Luke's account of the night that Jesus was arrested, Peter cuts off the ear of one of the servants of the High Priest. Jesus touched the man's ear and it was healed. And in John 13, before the Lord's Supper, Jesus gets up from the table and washes His disciples' feet.

Jesus had the hands and the heart of a servant. He set an example for all of us who would follow Him when He said that He came not to be served but to serve. During World War II, a church in Strasburg, Germany, was totally destroyed, but a statue of Jesus which stood by the altar was almost unharmed. Only the hands of the statue were missing. When the church was rebuilt, a famous sculptor offered to make new hands, but after considering the matter, the members decided to let it stand as it was – without hands. "For," they said, "Christ has no hands but ours to do His work on earth. If we don't feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, entertain the stranger, visit the imprisoned, and clothe the naked, who will? Jesus is depending on us to do the very things which He did while here on earth." We must remember that His hands and His grace still reach out to all those in need today through our hands.

Jesus also reached out to those who are considered outcasts of society; those who live on the edge; those that no one wants or sees. In Matthew 8, Jesus does the unacceptable, and touches a leper, a socially unclean person. In a world that despised and looked down on him, this man found a friend in Jesus and was healed immediately by His touch. In Mark 7, Jesus touches the ears and the tongue of a deaf mute, and restores his hearing and speech. As the hands of Jesus reached out to these individuals, it should be noted that Jesus came close when others kept their distance. When we feel left out and not wanted, we can take comfort in knowing that these very same hands are reaching out to us today when we are down and discouraged, when we feel that no one cares.

The gospels also record numerous times when Jesus restored the physical sight of individuals by His touch. In Matthew 9, the sight of two men was restored and Jesus told them not to tell anyone about what happened. But they could not keep the good news to themselves and went

around telling anyone who would listen. Matthew 20 tells us that when Jesus gave two more men their sight back by touching their eyes they followed Him. I believe that the 25th verse of the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Mark sums up Jesus' encounters with the blind best: "Then his eyes were opened, his sight restored, and he saw everything clearly." While our physical eye sight may be failing or gone, the touch of Jesus can restore our spiritual sight and allow us to see through the eyes of Jesus; to see life clearly from a different and better perspective.

Jesus not only can restore our sight, He can also restore our life just by His touch. Remember the story of Jairus' daughter? Jairus was the Jewish synagogue ruler whose twelve years old daughter was dying. He came to Jesus with great faith, and begged Him to come and put His hands on her so that she could be cured. As they are making their way to Jairus' house, they received word that the little girl had died. But Jesus told Jairus to not worry, but to believe that she would be healed. When He gets to the house, Jesus took her by the hand and told her to get up. Immediately she was healed by the touch of Jesus.

In Luke Jesus sees a widow following the coffin of her only son. His heart goes out to her and He tells her to not cry; He touches the coffin and the Bible says: "He gave him back to his mother." The touch of Jesus can also give us back our life. We are not dead physically, but we might be dead spiritually. We may be just going through the motions in life and not living even a fraction of the abundant life that Jesus promises to all who believe in Him. Do you feel dead, lifeless then reach out and as we will sing later: "put your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee," and be alive again!

And then there were the times when people were afraid and the touch of Jesus reassured them. One of my favorite ones is found in the text that Gordon/Ron read earlier from fourteenth chapter of Matthew when Peter tried to walk on the water and started to sink. Matthew tells us that immediately Jesus reached out and pulled Peter up out of the water, and as you read the New Testament you see Jesus continually pulling Peter up again and again throughout His ministry, as He does us. Later on the Mount of Transfiguration, when God speaks from the cloud, Peter, James and John fall face down in terror. Jesus comes and touches them and tells them to get up and not be afraid. When life scares us and we break out in a cold sweat, remember that the same hands that reached out to Peter as he was sinking and comforted the frighten disciples are ready at any time to embrace us and tell us: "Do not be afraid, I am here!"

When the Lord was here on earth, He frequently ministered to the needs of others with His hands. He broke bread to feed 5,000 hungry people. He made clay and rubbed it in the eyes of a blind man to give his sight. He touched an unclean leper in the act of cleansing him. After His resurrection, He said to a doubting Thomas: "Behold My Hands." One day, we, too, shall behold His hands!

The story is told of a young girl whose mother was very beautiful; all except her hands, which were shriveled, scarred and hideous. Although the child was reluctant to speak about them, the time eventually came when she asked her mother how her hands became so scarred.

The mother told her that their house had caught on fire when the girl was very little. The mother rushed upstairs to the room where the little girl was sleeping in her crib, and with the help of the Lord she was able to carry the baby downstairs and outside without being harmed. But in doing so, the mother's hands were severely burned. As the young girl listened to the story, tears ran down her cheeks and she said: "O mother, you know I have always loved you, especially your face, your smile, and your eyes. But now, best of all, I love your hands!"

The One who left His glory in heaven to become one of us bears on His compassionate hands the scars of His sacrifice on our behalf. His hands are an eternal reminder of His love for each one of us.

These wonderful hands – hands that healed the sick, restored sight, gave life, eased the frightened hearts, and reached out to the outcasts of life – are available to you this morning; in taking of the bread and the cup, the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is extended to each of us. Come and take the hands of the Master and be made whole once more. Amen