



Golden Verse

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." I Corinthians 12:27

Hands are one God's most fascinating creations. They are unique in the animal kingdom for the extent of their fine motor capability. Some evolutionary anthropologists have even suggested the human brain evolved the way it did because of our hands – not the other way around!

In our daily lives hands have considerable ability to disclose a wide range of feelings. A hand shaken in the shape of a fist conveys anger. A closed hand raised over the head signifies Black power. Hands cupped while raised upward are a sign of supplication. A fist bumped against another and then opened (i.e., fist bump) is a sign of joy and success and a hand raised to the temple while laid flat is a sign of deep respect and fealty – a salute.

Perhaps the most beautiful use of hands is sign language, which uses the full expressive range of hands to convey the thoughts of another. Hands can carry the stains of human guilt. A few of the most famous lines in literature concern the stains of sin that hands can carry. Lady Macbeth, "*Out damned spot!*", and more pertinent to us, Pilate's action at the crowd's insistence to crucify the Christ, "*he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility.'*"

It is no surprise then that hands play a critical role in Jesus' bodily ministry.

We are told He stretches them out in

compassion to heal the sick, "*At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.*" (Luke 4:40)

He uses them to grab hold of another to speak to Him the truth; when He shows the disciples His crucified hands they rejoice and in turn later Thomas does not believe until he both sees His hands close up and places his own hands *on Jesus wounds!* And in our text, He lays them upon children in order to offer them a blessing, that is a good word from God. A seemingly simple act to you and me, but in His time it was so much more.

Today we treat children with a special love, care, and patience, but in ancient times children were treated most terribly and often led desperate lives. All too often they were treated like property or free labor, like miniature adults, but without any rights whatsoever. Children existed to serve the needs of the parents.

In the 4,000-year-old Babylonian law known as *Hammurabi's Code* we find:

...harsh penalties... would befall any child who did not bestow appropriate honor and respect on the father who reared him. A son could lose a tongue, an eye, or fingers, depending on the circumstances of the offense. ...He could sell them into slavery or servitude. Though law required parents to rear all their sons and at least one female child,

all too often infants were simply abandoned.

And according to *Children of Ancient History*, there is more. An infant could be abandoned without penalty or social stigma for many reasons, including an anomalous appearance, being an illegitimate child or grandchild... The practice of selling sons lasted for about 600 years...

In this matter Jesus' is using His hands both to welcome and share His love with the children and to show the crowd that far from being ignored, used, and cast away in His kingdom children held a special place in His heart. And His power of touch, and ours, should not be underestimated.

It is in this way that our hands become the hands of Christ. To touch another in His name, to bless another in His name, and to pray to God in His name. We carry forward Jesus' love of children in the act of baptism when the pastor touches the forehead of the child, we do so in Jesus' name.

Hands in Prayer

The Order of Service cover shows you the exquisitely expressive work of the 16th century artist Albrecht Durer, *Hands in Prayer*. If you have strolled through the Metropolitan Museum of Art, you have noticed that it took artists a considerable number of centuries to get hands right. The hands looked wooden, artificial, and lifeless. In my eyes, some of these otherwise masterful paintings look bizarre as a result. But Durer has captured not just the facsimile of the hands but their depth. You can see the years of life those hands have lived; you can see the imperfections, the struggle, the humility, and most of all, the solemnity of the one praying... just in those hands.

If you were in Chapel with the children of the Brick Church Day School, you would see how carefully and "whispery" they fold their hands before prayer, right up to their lips. Those hands disclose the sacredness of prayer in the earnestness of their hands.

When Jesus prayed to God in prayer, historic evidence suggests He folded His hands or raised them above His head or perhaps He did both but either way surely He used His hands to focus His prayer on God. And when we do so, we emulate our Lord and use our hands to draw us that much closer to God.

It is said that those who so devote themselves in Christ-like prayer might even come to bear some marks on their hands that marked Jesus hands at the crucifixion. Called Stigmata, reports through the centuries appeared of those with heroic Christlike virtues. Listen to this account:

The first example of the alleged miraculous infliction of stigmata occurred in St. Francis of Assisi. While in his cell on Mount Alverno in 1224, pondering on the sufferings of Christ, Francis was purportedly visited by a seraph who produced upon his body the five wounds of Christ. Pope Alexander IV and others attested that they had seen these marks both before and after Francis's death. The divinely attested sanctity of its founder gave to the newly established order of Franciscans a powerful impulse.

Laying on Hands

Because we sanctify our hands in prayer, they become equipped to empower others for service to God! Laying on of hands occurs many times in scripture and it is done to

commission people for the work of God. In Acts 19:6, *“When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.”* In some mysterious ways God has created us so that when we share our hearts and hopes through the laying on of hands, people experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

It is a deeply significant act and many of those so ordained at Brick have shared their experience with me. When we ordain officers in this church as all the elders encircle them and lay hands on their shoulders, they feel the weight of God’s responsibility. But it is an electric feeling in which the faith, the wisdom, and the power of those elders is shared with them through the touch of their hands. They can feel the elders’ hopes upon them and feel the elders help, that they will not be in it alone.

It is in this sharing and the electric nature of this act that laying on of hands finds its paradigmatic power, especially in the concept of Apostolic Succession.

Those ordained in our time have been ordained by the generation before them, who were ordained by the generation before them, who were ordained by the generation before them.... Through two thousand years of the church there is an unbroken line all the way back to our Lord Himself. This is all done through the laying on of hands, so that the hands who have touched you eventually were touched by the Lord Himself. It brings Christ right into our midst.

Through hands in prayer, and human touch, our hands can lead ourselves and others closer to God. Like Albrecht’s praying hands, or those with Stigmata, when they bear the marks of our years, our fears, our tears, they can sway human hearts to change.

There is a wonderful poem written in 1867 by Rose Hardwick that tells the legend of a young woman named Bessie trying to save her beloved during the English war that broke out in the 1,600s during Oliver Cromwell’s reign. He was sentenced to die when the church bells ring at Sunset.

*Determined that the bell not ring, she begs the church sexton to abandon his duty, but he refuses. Undaunted, she climbed to the bell tower and wrapped her hands around the clapper. Though the sexton pulled on the rope, the bell did not ring. The poem ends with these lines: **

*O’er the distant hills came Cromwell;
Bessie saw him; and her brow,*

*Lately white with care and anguish,
glows with sudden beauty now,*

*At his feet she told her story, showed her
hands, all bruised and torn;*

*And her sweet young face, still wearing
traces of the anguish borne,*

*Touched his heart with sudden pity, lit his
eyes with misty light.*

*“Go! your lover lives,” cried Cromwell.
“Curfew shall not ring to-night.”*

Her bruised and bloodied hands that were wrapped around the clapper showed Cromwell the depth of her love and Cromwell was moved to compassion. Because Jesus’ hands were wrapped around the tree; our curfew does not ring, and God moves with compassion. Amen.

*<https://devo.paulchappell.com/wounded-hands-jesus>

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