

Sermon :: 09-Aug-2026
Proper 14, Year A

“ Jesus immediately reached out His HAND ”

Have you ever noticed ... thought about ... how much we use our *HANDS* in worship? Yes, the old jokes about ‘Episcopal calisthenics’—how much we move our bodies during the liturgy—are true: We do a lot of sitting, standing and kneeling. And yes, the oft-mentioned ‘multi-sensory’ aspect of our worship experience is *also* a ‘thing’: we see and hear, we taste and touch ... and occasionally—and how I really do *long* for incense, some days!—we even smell.

And yet, probably the most highly *worked* ... and yet, least often *recognized* ... body-parts in this place, Sunday after Sunday, are our *HANDS*. We fold them, to *pray*. We extend them, in *peace*. We may lift them, in *praise*. We open them, as we *offer* our *gifts*. We trace crosses with them when we’re absolved of our sins or blessed by our God. And perhaps most tenderly of *all* ... we make a pillow—or maybe a throne—of them at the rail, as we receive, again, the wholly unmerited and yet lavishly bestowed grace of Christ, in the gift of His Body.

And perhaps all this *HAND*iwork ... all this *MANUAL* labor (!) ... is appropriate—indeed, even *symbolic*. For as we hear every Sunday, we go forth from this place to *be* the *HANDS* of Christ in this world ... to *use* our hands to bless this world: in His Name ... with His love ... for His glory.

Our *HANDS* can hold ... carry ... rescue ... and show. They can feed ... clothe ... bathe ... and embrace. Our *HANDS* can squeeze ... stroke ... clench ... and caress. They can stitch ... separate ... pound... and protect. And perhaps the most *important* ... the most *amazing* ... thing our *HANDS* can do is *save*.

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It’s a beautiful story of fledgling faith and tender grace. Peter ... emboldened—impassioned—enraptured—by his faith in Jesus ... asks for the power to walk upon water, even if for just a moment. And he *receives* it: gets out of the boat and takes a few, hesitant-and-yet-buoyant steps. Eyes glued on Jesus’ face, Peter can quite literally do *anything* he sets his mind to, in faith.

But then, he “*notice[s]*.” He looks around ... becomes self-aware ... realizes where he is, calculates the improbability of his success ... and the whole world comes crashing in upon him once more: I shouldn’t be *doing* this! I shouldn’t be *able* to do this! I might look *foolish* ... I might *fail* ... I might *drown*. And at once, Peter begins to sink: his mind stubbornly stuck on the realities ... the challenges ... all the *MUST BE*s and *IT’S IMPOSSIBLE*s ... of this world.

And just then ... just as Peter’s about to go under ... just as the last scrap of *can-do faith* is giving way to *no-way reality* ... from the darkness comes Jesus’ outstretched *HAND*. “Take it,” says Jesus. “Hold it. Cling to it. Let it support you. Let it lift you. Let it peace you ... calm you ... rest you ... hold you ... center you ... return you. Take my *HAND*,” says Jesus, “and let it *save* you. Let Me share with you, in the touch of My *HAND* ... *My* faith in God ... which is enough for *both* of us.” And with that *HAND*, Jesus carefully places Peter back in the safety and security of the boat, sailing now in silent calm.

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This world’s *need* for *HANDS* ... for *helping* *HANDS*, for *giving* *HANDS*, for *saving* *HANDS* ... is virtually endless, in both quantity and variety. We need *HANDS* to make meals, and *HANDS* to make peace.

HANDS to plant trees, and HANDS to sow goodwill. HANDS to build housing, and HANDS to shelter the beaten-down. HANDS to heal broken bones, and HANDS to heal broken people.

This world needs physical HANDS ... financial HANDS ... technological HANDS ... and emotional HANDS. Offering HANDS ... accepting HANDS ... bridging HANDS ... risking HANDS. Powerful HANDS ... delicate HANDS ... knowing HANDS ... and hoping HANDS.

And also ... *charitable* HANDS ... *compassionate* HANDS ... *faithful* HANDS ... *spiritual* HANDS. For the story of Peter and Jesus out on the water is not only an episode, but also a *metaphor*; not only a *story* to *tell*, but also a *parable*—a mysterious-yet-fundamental message—for us to *live* by. For this world is *full* of people like Peter, who *want* to believe ... who *want* to hope ... who *want* to pray ... who *want* to trust ... who *want* to be assured ... who *want* to join ... who *want* to be *saved*. And yet, every time they take a first few tentative steps ... they begin to *notice*—notice the world *around* them: notice its '*better* gospel' of riches and pleasure; notice its '*myths*' of total-self-reliance and all-me; notice its preaching of '*just desserts*'—you get what you *deserve* ... and '*natural order*'—some are just *born* to lead (or rule or succeed); notice its scorn of faith and wonder, of seeking and surrender; notice its intolerance of prayer as foolishness, and its rejection of God as fantasy. And, overwhelmed by this *no-way reality*, their would-be *faith* ... begins to *sink*.

But we, my friends, can give these people a *HAND*! We can *rescue* them from drowning in the merciless, relentless MUST BE and IT'S IMPOSSIBLES of this world: its grinding, self-serving insistence not *only* that humanity's 'in this' all by itself ... but *also* that we're somehow better *off* that way. And *how* can we give them a *HAND*? By sharing the Good News *we've* found in *Christ*; by proclaiming *His* place in *our* lives and *His* promise in *our* hearts. Saint Paul quotes Isaiah (52:7) when he writes, "How beautiful are the *feet* of those who bring good news" ... but can't we readily substitute *HANDS*?

Yes—and maybe you've already sensed it!—I am indeed tiptoeing up to the dreaded '*E-word*': evangelism. But I think it's high time to re-imagine our calling to share Christ with others as a *helping HAND*, rather than a *spiritual bludgeoning* ... as a *HAND-up* of *hope*, rather than a *smack-down* of *judgment*. For at its root, the gesture ... the opened-HAND ... of evangelism is simply *sharing*: sharing what *brings* you here ... what *keeps* you here ... what you *receive* here.

- Can you share with one family member what it is to gather in one place, for an hour or two a week, as a spiritual *family*: *with* mutual understanding and acceptance, and *without* judgment or critique?
- Can you share with one friend what it means to *you, personally*, to hear the story of Jesus told and interpreted ... to be reassured that He really *has* forgiven all your sins ... to receive Him, anew, in sacrament ... to be blessed, again, in His grace and by His glory?
- Can you share with one neighbor or coworker ... a parent of your kid's best friend; a fellow member of your team or club ... how *uplifting* it is to give hours of your time to helping others enjoy the dignity of a *shower*? how *affirming* it is to come together to put on a marketplace that raises tens of thousands of dollars, every year, to make life better for our neighbors across this *city*, the *county*, and *beyond*? how *good* it is to be part of a '*cause*' in which you have no '*vested interest*'—no tangible, earthly '*stake*'—and yet, that helps transform the *world*?

You don't need to quote Bible verses from memory ... carry on about hell and damnation ... urge anyone to get baptized ... or even know what "Who proceeds from the Father and the Son" means.* No: Just offer someone a HANDful of the *hope* Jesus gives you; a HANDful of the *meaning faith* in Him gives *your* life; a HANDful of the *peace* and *assurance you* feel every time you come here; a HANDful of *God's grace*—God's ALWAYS-WITH-US-AND-FOR-US-NESS—you receive every time *you* open *your* HANDS in this place.

For whether or not we can see them: indeed, whether or not *they* can see *themselves* ... this world is *full* of Peters, HANDS outstretched—straining—in silent *agony*; asking—pleading—to be *saved*. And all Jesus asks us to do is to reach out *our* HANDS to them, in faith ... and share a HANDful of *Him*.

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* Ask me sometime. (I'm definitely in the pro-FILIOQUE camp.)