

# The Hands of Jesus

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We don't do children's messages in the summer but I'm going to begin with one. Sometimes they are the most interesting part of the service.

There was a time when if I clutched my hands into fists you could see as many as ten white scars on the fingers and back of each hand. Time has been good to my skin and now I can only see a couple of scars. But I wonder if one of these days my grandson, Roman, will point to one of those scars and ask "Pop, Pop, What happened to your hand?" And I'll tell him.

In the middle of my life I left the full time ministry, learned the air conditioning/heating trade, got a contractors license, and started a company which I named Hoover and Sons. (If you were to dial the old company number during the summer, Katie Fisher would have answered the phone and said, "This is Hoover Law office. May I help you?" Don't ask me how Hoover and Sons became Hoover Law Office. That's a mystery.)

Next I bought out the sheet metal equipment of a bankrupted air conditioning company and installed a sheet metal fabricating shop in my own company.

Then I'll probably take Roman into my garage, at home and show him some of the tools I still have leftover from those days. There are the sheet metal shears, sometimes called "tin snips." On job sites the carpenters often call edme "the Tin Man." The tin snips are both left, the green, and right, the red. You need to learn how to work with both hands with equal skill to cut a circle of of a flat piece of metal. I might even introduce him to the word "ambidextrous".

Next I'll show him a piece of sheet metal and tell him that the edges of this metal, when cut, can be as sharp as a knife. You should always work with leather gloves, leather on both sides of the hand with high cuffs, but when you try to take short cuts, not putting on the gloves, you often get cut. And you end up with an "owewy". And, Roman, that's what happened to my hand.

Now if this is a children's sermon it needs to have a moral. I guess the lesson here is, don't compromise safety for you may get hurt. In other words, don't take dangerous short cuts...like when you skate board or ride your bike, always take time to put on your helmet.

For a period of 35 years I remember this picture of Jesus hanging in the hallway in my family home in Pittsburgh,

Pennsylvania.

Jesus is sitting in a garden with some children around him. You recognize him because he is portrayed as a stereotype with which we are familiar. You might have expected the picture to be captioned "Let the little children come unto me and forbid them not for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." But no, it is titled "What happened to your Hand"?

I typed that title into the World Wide Web and found that painting and printed it in full color. And Linda Calkins made this poster of that picture. I hadn't seen it for 25 years.

Here is Jesus sitting in a garden, beautiful flowers all around him. Three children are with him. They are 7 or 8 years old. A girl is standing by his side. A boy is sitting on the grass by his feet. The boy has an airplane in his hand, which dates the picture to be very modern. A girl is sitting on his lap. Jesus has one arm around her and he is holding his hand out like he is gesturing a he tells a story. But the girl has been distracted. The girl is pointing to his open hand and asking "What happened to your hand?"

The internet has told me a lot more than I ever knew about the painting and the artist. His name is Harry Anderson. He lived from 1906 to 1996. He did this painting about 1945. This was his first painting with a Christian theme. It was so widely popular when it was published that he spent the rest of his life painting pictures of Bible people and events. He made a transition in mid-career from being a commercial artist to a religious artist.

Why do you think it was so popular? "What happened to your hand?" Do you think it is because we are stimulated to wonder how Jesus would answer that question? I remember when I first saw the painting I thought, "How sad, eight years old and she doesn't know anything about the life and death of Jesus." Apparently, she doesn't know who this beautiful, loving man is. I was a preacher's kid and by the time I was eight I had experienced many Good Fridays and Easter Sudnays. I'll bet at five years old I could have told you what happened to Jesus' hands.

Next, looking at the painting I remember thinking, "I wonder what Jesus said. How did he answer her questions?"

I found myself fantasizing a bit. What if Jesus turned to me and said, "You answer that question. Tell her what happened to my hand." What would I say? What would

you say? “Evil men nailed him to a cross by his hands and hung him up to die.” That’s a little abrupt, isn’t it?...a little harsh, shocking in such a bucolic setting.

I showed this picture to our Bible Class which meets at Coco’s. No one wanted to tell these children the cruel, unvarnished truth. They didn’t want to shock or traumatize them. They look so innocent. They are so young. If these were today’s kids, would it be any different? Our kids see violence and death on huge screens or in the family room at home in full living color at least once a week. Can they be traumatized?

“What happened to your hand?” How gentle can we be? The truth is not pretty. What might Jesus say?

“My name is Jesus. In a time of violence I preached peace. In a time of fear I preached hope. In a time of hatred I preached forgiveness and love. Some powerful religious leaders were afraid of my influence. They were jealous of my large, devoted following. They had me arrested and sentenced to death. And soldiers drove nails through my hands and hung me on a cross where I died. But God loved me so much that he gave me life again. And that’s why I’m here able to teach you lessons of forgiveness, hope and love. That’s what happened to my hand.” (You may want to come up here after the service to take a closer look at this painting.)

Are there children in your life? How would you answer this question if one of them asked it? And after you have given your very best answer, how will you deal with the next question? WHY did this happen?

Have you ever heard of the stigmata? That’s the name given to the scars on Jesus’ hands. Through the years Saints of the Church, and pretenders, have claimed that the scars of Jesus’ hands have appeared on their hands during prayer or during an experience of religious ecstasy. Actually it was Saint Francis of Assisi who first claimed the miracle of the stigmata. St. Francis is famous for more than his loving devotion to animals and nature. He is known for the stigmata.

From the 14th century, when St. Francis lived, to the 20th century 330 persons have claimed the stigmata. The church has taken this very seriously. They have checked each claim and investigated each one. Many of these persons had driven nails through their own hands and they were, of course, declared fraudulent. You don’t create the stigmata by yourself or have your friends do it to you. It happens spiritually. It is a miracle. Sixty people among those 330 people have been called authentic, and have been declared saints of the church. Now you know the meaning of the word stigmata.

I think people being obsessed by the stigmata miss the

whole essence of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. This obsession with his suffering does not reach me. The suffering of Jesus certainly was excruciating and speaks volumes about the conviction and obedience of Jesus to God’s plan. But the influence and power of Jesus’ life is so much more than his suffering.

Several years ago we had our modern day obsession with the suffering and agony of Christ. Many of you saw it. I did not. I don’t ever want to. I would not criticize a movie I have never seen. I’m not criticizing it as a movie. I am criticizing the theology behind it. I think it is much more beneficial for each of us spiritually to concentrate upon the positive message which Jesus brings us, love of God, love of neighbor, love of self. Let’s learn the message of his parables and learn from his discussions with his critics. There is so much more to his message than the stigmata.

I would rather dwell on his healing hands, not his wounded hands. “What happened to your hand?”

I have found it very interesting exploring the hands of Jesus. He had the tough, callused hands of a carpenter. They were not the soft, tender hands of a “gentle Jesus, meek and mild.” It seems he grew up in his father, Joseph’s, carpenter shop. We don’t know when Jesus’ father died but Jesus could have worked in his shop with his brothers supporting the family for many years after his dad was gone.

Jesus used his hands in many different ways in his ministry.

He touched his disciples and sent them out to minister on their own.

He touched the sick and they were healed.

He touched the lame and they walked.

He touched the blind and they could see.

He touched the dead and they lived.

He raised his hands and calmed the storm.

He touched the food basket and fed thousands.

He reached out to Peter and stopped him from sinking and helped him into the boat.

He showed his hands to his disciples after his resurrection, especially to Doubting Thomas, and convinced them that he really was Jesus.

I see a special use of his hands in his involvement with Zachaeus. Some people might say that it was no big deal but it was a big deal. Do you remember the story? Zachaeus was the little, short guy who couldn’t see over the crowd who climbed the sycamore tree to get a good look at Jesus over the heads of the crowd. Jesus went over

to the tree, invited Zachaeus to have lunch with him and I am sure used his hands to help him get down out of that tree.

I see tremendous symbolism here, which applies to all of us. Zachaeus had heard a lot about Jesus. At this point in his ministry Jesus was a celebrity widely known for his teaching and healing. Zachaeus wanted to know if this guy was for real, so he climbed a tree to get a good look.

I think many of us are up in a tree. I wonder if any of you would be willing to admit that you are up a tree. We have heard a lot about Jesus - he is a celebrity, but we would like to know him better. Would you like to have lunch with Jesus? I sure would. Look what happened to Zachaeus. It changed his life. He stood up in the middle of the meal and declared a total conversion to a new lifestyle. And this happened when Jesus reached up and helped him out of the tree. And got personal with him. Let's invite Jesus to help us out of that tree, and get personal with us.

The thought I would like you to take away from this message is an invitation to place your life in the hands of Jesus.