

Talk Maundy Thursday 2016

I'd like to begin tonight by everyone looking at your hands, I don't mean a quick glance, but really look at your hands and see what you notice.

Our hands say a lot about us, they can indicate what kind of job we do. What our diet is like, (whether we're a smoker or not) doctors can diagnose a lot of illnesses from looking at people's hands. In different sayings hands are given special abilities someone maybe green fingered, perhaps caught red handed and as good Christian's we're often ready to "give someone a hand". That last one once had a bit of awkwardness when my Mum said it to our one armed next door neighbour who was changing a tyre, fortunately he saw the funny side. Is there something darker in our hands, as Lady Macbeth said "out damned spot I say!"

Hands can speak for themselves, this afternoon I was at a school Easter service where the children signed the words to all the songs, as one child in the school is deaf. Even without sign language our hands can say a lot, for some the movement of their hands emphasises every word they speak. Or gestures can say so much, Winston Church famously pictured giving the peace sign. Or reverse it and you've got what the English bowmen gestured to the French at Agincourt.

So as we think of these expressive parts, I wonder what Jesus' hands looked like? Hands that may have worked in his father's carpentry shop, builders hands. Hands that had the hot sun on them as he moved around, spent time on fishing boats. We hear throughout the gospels that these were hands that could heal, could comfort, turn water into wine.

And as we reflect on the events of Maundy Thursday, the last supper and move towards Good Friday, we remember hands that washed his disciples feet, hands that broke bread, hands that lifted a cup of wine and hands that prayed to God for strength and help.

One of my favourite hymns is Servant King and in particular the third verse which says

"Come, see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space,
to cruel nails surrendered."

What a wonderful line "hands that flung stars into space, to cruel nails surrendered." That line gives even deeper meaning to the events of that last supper, for it was not Jesus who humbled himself and washed the

disciples feet, it was God, creator of all things that took on that menial task.

As Christians we constantly try to fulfil the Jesus role in a feet washing scenario, to wash the feet, to serve, but we can forget about the other side, to be served, to be ministered too. If we're not careful we can fall in to the Peter role, "you're not washing my feet". Sometimes it can be hard to let others do things for us or to us. As eager as we maybe to step forward to do things, there are times when we have to step back and let others take on the role. To allow others to fulfil their potential and for us to make ourselves vulnerable.

Later in the service there will be the opportunity for everyone to have their hands washed. Thanks to newer development of footwear and transport methods we don't usually wash someone's feet when they enter the house.

But in a world of germs and microorganisms washing our hands is more common, especially before eating. It seems appropriate as we come towards the remembrance of the Last Supper and communion that it is our hands that are washed.

Perhaps as you experience having your hands washed by someone else you can think about what you need to develop more of in your life, is it to serve or is it to let others serve you. Possibly how awkward you feel at the time may help to give you an idea of which it is for you.

Over the next few days we once again journey with Jesus through the Easter story. As you go through those days continue to think about Jesus' hands, the hands that were bound as a prisoner, carried the rough cross of wood before being nailed to it. But also hands that would see new life on Easter morning. What may you carry in your hands over the next few days, what will you do with your hands and in a few days' time what will your hands say about you?

It would be wrong of me in a talk about hands not to mention the words of St Teresa of Avila, and as we join together in communion later standing together as one body of Christ, please remember these words.

St Teresa said "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world."

So look again at your hands, what do your hands say about you? Are they gentle hands or do they have a painful darker history?

Are they hands that carry too much or are they hands that could carry more? Are they hands that serve? Are they hands that allow others to serve you no matter how awkward that may be? Are they hands through which Christ blesses all the world?