

Sermon Easter 2C  
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All Saints, Mt. Pleasant  
April 24, 2022

John 20:19-21

19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." 26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." 30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

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She was an amazing woman. She was the first female to serve on church council at her West Virginia congregation. First woman to be a communion assistant and lay reader. She was also the first woman in that congregation to wear a pantsuit to church! Kris' grandmother, Ellen Smaagaard, was a pioneer, a trendsetter, creative, bold. A woman of sincere faith throughout her 90 well-lived years.

She was extremely thoughtful, and so sincere. She had this smile that was so honest – you could tell that she was truly happy to see you – But I think the thing I will remember most vividly about her is her hands. In her prime, she stood nearly six feet tall, and she had these huge hands. even when she shrunk down with age, her large hands and long fingers were still such a defining characteristic. Despite their size, however, when she reached out and held your hand in hers, there was this incredible softness about them. I think it came with age – her flesh was so pillowy soft by the time she reached 90, that when you touched her, it was almost hard to tell where her hand stopped and your hand began.

I think about what those hands did through her lifetime. All the tomatoes she picked – she had quite the green thumb. All the babies she held – she had four of her own, and many more grandchildren & great grandchildren – All the things she painted when she was working on her traditional Norwegian

handicrafts. I think about all the meals those hands prepared as she worked so tirelessly in the kitchen at her church. All the Christmas play costumes she laid across her busy sewing table. All the ministry she had her hands in over 90 years as an active participant in God's work in that mission outpost called the local congregation. She was an inspiration to me, and when I remember her, I think of how her hands became instruments of service for her family and her church.

“Put your finger here and see my hands” Jesus says in today's reading from the Gospel of John. “Reach out your hand and put it in my side,” See my hands – touch my side, Jesus says to Thomas, as he's struggling to believe that this miraculous thing he's heard of has really come to pass – that Jesus once was dead but is alive again. “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe,” Thomas says.

This is a very tactile Gospel reading we have today – lots of sensory language used to describe the body of Christ: Reach out, touch, put your hand in my side... Look and see the scars in my hands... The message this week after Easter, as we stand reeling in the wake of the resurrection, in awe at the sight of the empty tomb, is that New Life in Christ is something that can be seen and heard and touched – the risen Christ is among us! – and it's a hands-on experience. New Life in Christ is a living, breathing force in our midst. It's real enough to hold onto, and it leaves footprints when it goes.

“We have seen the Lord!” the disciples proclaim to Thomas. Something transformational is happening among us – and it is real – and we have seen it! Have you seen it? Have you seen the Body of Christ at work? Have you heard it? Have you reached out and touched it with your hands? I have. I can tell you, I look around here every day, And I can join with the first disciples in proclaiming to Thomas, “We have seen the Lord!” I look around here and see and hear and feel the Body of Christ alive in our midst and in the midst of this community, when I look around and see and hear... you!

What have you heard? or seen? or looked at and touched that shows forth the Resurrection? Have you heard children, using their precious voices to sing praises to God, as they share their music in worship? Or youth giving witness to their growing faith by reading the word and sharing their gifts on Youth Sunday? Have you seen the pounds of garden produce our volunteers pull from the dirt with their own hands to donate to those in need in our community? Or the food prepared for the benefit of this church fellowship or for the hungry gathered the Hot Dog Ministry downtown? Or the prayer shawls and Quilts made lovingly by hand to lift up those who are sick or have served our country? Have you heard the chatter of the Via de Cristo volunteers working countless hours to pull together a meaningful spiritual retreat for the upcoming weekend's participants? Or the words of the visitation and Eucharistic ministers who bring hope to the elderly and institutionalized? Or have you felt a warm hand on your shoulder, during a time someone here knew you needed a bit of encouragement or comfort?

I have. I have seen and heard and felt the presence of Christ on your faces, in your words of faith and encouragement. That's why we repeat that Lutheran motto: God's work – Our hands. All of us can look around this place and say “We have seen the Lord” at work. Because you are God's hands and feet in the world. You are the presence of Christ that this world is going to see and hear and touch and feel – you are the truth that this world can hold onto when they reach out their hands for something more.

I don't know about you, but Easter week always brings a swirl of emotions for me. We began the week riding high from a glorious Easter – and the joy of seeing so many faces of those who celebrated with us here. But when we leave our Resurrection celebrations, we return to the ugly

realities of war, gun violence and tragedy that surround us. It's hard to keep that Easter Joy, and to celebrate LIFE, when it seems like all we hear on the news is reports of violence and death.

We have to remember what we read in the story today – about how the disciples experience the risen Christ. We have to remember that when our Lord and Savior appeared to his brothers in the upper room, he was alive and whole again – but in his hands, he still carried scars. The risen Christ still bore the scars from the wounds inflicted on him by the world. And so, if we say we are to be the Body of Christ in the world, baptized to be His hands and His feet for his mission, then we too are going to live with the reality that even New Life bears scars.

We ourselves are not going to be immune from the damage sin and darkness can inflict on these earthly bodies, or stamp on our souls... As the hands and the feet of Christ in the world, we are going to have to expect to be confronted with opposition from the forces that only revel in self-glorification and seek to dampen the good news. If we are to be about God's work with Our hands, we have to be prepared to get our hands dirty in the work of standing up for justice and saying "no" to the power of sin, and expect that we may come away with a few scars from the day-to-day work of carrying the cross.

This Easter season, I invite you to see and hear and look and feel and RECOGNIZE the presence of the risen Christ as he reaches for your hand...but also to look and to see and to listen for the ways YOU are being called to Christ's body in the world, the ways you are equipped to carry out his mission, with the hands and the feet that God has given you - no matter how big or how small - to live into your baptismal calling to participate in God's creative and redeeming work in this church, this community and all the world.