

Sermon
24 May 2020
West Kirk of Calder/Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: Luke 24:44-53

Hymn: CH4 351 Jesus' hands were kind hands

READING

Luke 24:44-53

44 Jesus said to his disciples, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

46 He told them, 'This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. 52 Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

MESSAGE

Today is our 10th Sunday in lockdown. Can you believe it?! I think it's safe to say that by now we are all quite used to this strange situation...

So, I'm wondering: what have you been up to since lockdown started? I know that lots of people decided to use this time to do all those things they never have time for – sort wardrobes out, redecorate rooms, give the house a proper clean, crafting, reading, dusting off old hobbies, cooking, baking, tidying up the garden...

I know some people have been really busy, while others are using this time to catch up on much needed rest. I know that some people are feeling really lonely and can't wait to meet up with others again, while others are quite enjoying the peace and quiet.

And then of course there are the people who are working, some even harder than usual, under difficult circumstances. Behind computers, over the phone, in shops, delivering orders, posties, emergency workers, carers, hospital staff...

Caring hands. Busy hands. We are all doing what we have to, or what we can, to keep our hands busy.

We have a friend who always comes to help us with DIY jobs in the house, because, he says, *André's* hands were made for praying, and nothing else! André and DIY equals disaster...

We are all different, and our lives don't look the same, but the one thing we all seem to have in common, is the feeling that the days seem to fly

by. One minute you wake up, and in the blink of an eye it's bedtime again.

And this gave me an idea: Why don't you send me a photo of *one* thing you've been doing during lockdown, so I can make up an album we can look back on when all this will just be a distant memory? Wouldn't that be nice? So please email your photo to me, or send it via text or WhatsApp.

One of the things *I've* been doing during lockdown, is home schooling... Between 9am and 3:30pm every weekday, our dining room is transformed into a classroom, where I have to magically divide myself between being a P6 and S1 teacher, all at the same time! My 2 pupils, who would both rather be doing *anything else* but schoolwork, are not very impressed with my teaching skills.

Let me give you a laugh – the other day, after I told Nehan that his break won't start before his work is finished, he said: "Mum, you are the worst teacher ever!" Just then André knocked on the door, and said in his best headteacher voice: "Excuse me, Mrs G, would you like me to take over here?" to which Nehan, quick as a flash, responded: "But you know what mum, you are the *best* teacher in *this* house!"

Honestly, I salute all teachers out there. It's hard!

But last week, for his art lesson, Henro had something fun to do. He had to recreate a famous painting. So he chose Michelangelo's *The creation of Adam*.

He roped his wee brother in to help him, and here you can see Henro's hand representing God's hand, and Nehan's hand representing Adam's:



And you know, when I saw this, it immediately made me think of our situation at the moment. Of the fact



that we are not allowed to touch people. Two hands stretched out towards each other, *almost* touching... And to me this picture portrayed the longing in our hearts to be able to reach out and touch our loved ones.

But for their own safety, and ours, we can't do that at the moment. There is one hand that can still touch our hands, though; even touch our hearts, and that is the hand of God.

God came close to us in Jesus. Jesus' ministry to people was a ministry of touching – he touched people to comfort them, to heal them, to bless them. And then, those same hands that made so many people whole, were broken on the cross, to save us all.

But the grave couldn't hold Jesus, and his broken hands were what convinced his closest friends that he was alive again.

And 40 days after his resurrection, he took his disciples to the Mount of Olives, lifted up his hands, and blessed them.

During all the major Jewish festivals, when the high priest would come out of the temple, he would lift his hands in a blessing like this over the people of God. And that is what we do at the end of every church service too – the minister will lift his/her hands in a blessing – reminding the people there that God will be with them until they all meet again.

Jesus blessed his disciples, and then he ascended into heaven. With the promise that they would never be alone, that God would send them a helper – his Holy Spirit. And that is what we will all celebrate together as a national and international church next Sunday.

The one thing that stands out to me in our reading, is the fact that the disciples returned to Jerusalem *with great joy*.

Up until now, they've had so many questions in their hearts. So much uncertainty in their lives. And you would think seeing Jesus *leave* would make this worse. But it didn't. Because now, at last, they understood why Jesus came to earth. They knew that although he wasn't with them anymore, he would actually be with them forever. In their hearts, in their heads, in their hands.

From now on they would *feel* his love, *say* what he taught them, and *do* what he showed them.

And this is something that only a Christian can understand: He wasn't with them anymore, yet, he was. He was far away, and at the very same time closer to them than ever before.

And that is still the case today. Jesus came to earth to do what he had to do and then went back to God in heaven. Yet – he is not only there, he is here too. He is still in our hearts.

Let's make sure that Jesus is not only in our hearts, but in our words and in our deeds too. Let's bring him close to those who are struggling to see him. And what a better time to do that, than now? When the whole world is upside down, in desperate need of reassurance...

We might not be able to touch each other at the moment – but nothing can stop God from touching our lives. No problem, no hardship, no grief, no question, no disaster, no pandemic, can ever place a barrier between God's hands and our hearts.

He cradles our sometimes fragile, sometimes questioning hearts in his almighty hands. And no matter what happens, he will never let go.

So when I lift my hands in a blessing at the end of our service today – let that be a reminder to you that God WILL be with you, wherever you are, until we meet again.

Amen

PRAYER

Written by Rev Alison Quilter

Almighty God, we gather today reminded of your greatness and glory and your sovereign power with which you made the world; and for the love which you designed it and the mercy with which you have blessed it. We praise you for your authority, your majesty and your grace.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father though you are beyond our understanding, you are nearer than breathing; though your holiness rejects our sinfulness and selfishness, your love reaches out to touch us.

We praise you that though we cannot reach up to the heights of your glory and power, your mercy in Christ's life, death and resurrection stoops lower to hold us and heal us. Lord, your glory overwhelms us, your power enables us, your mercy cleanses us and your spirit fills us.

Lord, we thank you for Jesus and we praise you for his mighty ascension, which speaks to us of his power and glory, his sovereignty and authority. As we rejoice in the Ascension, we give thanks for men and women of vision who have shared their faith with us. Lord, empower your church to proclaim the Good News of your saving acts.

We pray for those who feel life is dull, that they may come to know joy of the presence of the ascended Lord. As we rejoice in your presence, we remember all who feel lonely and neglected in our world. We ask your blessing on all who are oppressed and those who are struggling to survive.

We remember people of all ages struggling to come to terms with the pandemic of covid 19. Bring hope to their lives loving Father. Hold them and let them know your peace. We ask your blessing upon all who are ill, may they find courage and hope in you and in your abiding love.

As we rejoice in your love, we remember our community and neighbourhoods. We ask your blessing upon all who strive to brighten the world by their faith and willingness to sacrifice.

May our prayers, by your power and love, bring faith, hope and courage to others and joy to our ascended Lord. Amen.

HYMN

CH4 351:1&2

Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all,
Healing pain and sickness, blessing children small;
Washing tired feet, and saving those who fall;
Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all.

Take my hands, Lord Jesus, let them work for you,
Make them strong and gentle, kind in all I do;
Let me watch you, Jesus, till I'm gentle too,
Till my hands are kind hands, quick to work for you.

BLESSING

May the Lord bless you and keep you
May the lord make his face shine upon you
And be gracious unto you
May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you
And give you peace.
Amen