

In the Hands of Christ

4th Sunday in Lent

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***Text:* St. John 6:1**When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which bath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down, Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand; And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

This day I bring you greetings from a loving God on this 4th Sunday of Lent, also known as Rose Sunday, whose precious hands reach out to us all, and hold us up.

This day is commonly called Rose Sunday in the Church Calendar because it marks the middle of the Lenten Season. It is a day of relief from the perceived burden of sacrifice of the season, a day where we can take a breather to give us strength to get through to the finish. It is also an opportunity to reflect on how our relationship is strengthening with Christ.

The Disciples found themselves in a similar situation. In this story from the Gospel of St. John, we find our Lord just after the wedding at Cana and early in His ministry, about to speak to those gather to hear what he had to say. He was still teaching his disciples about who he was and about the message he was there to convey. His disciples have been watching him closely, listening to his every word, trying to get their arms around their relationship with him.

While in this case he feeds some 5,000 people who have come to listen to him, the real miracle of what he is doing is only seen by those closest to him. The boy who had the basket, Philip, Andrew, Simon Peter and the others who were around him saw the truth of what was happening. The small amount of fishes and loaves of barley-not even good fare, were to be used not as a miracle to convince the 5,000 but instead those who were really closest to him. His disciples were the first he was to build a lasting relationship with for they would be tasked to carry out his work after he had returned to the Father. He knew the road ahead was going to be hard and he wanted them to understand not only who he was but also that they were always in his loving hands no matter what would happen as they spread the Gospel.

These were the hands that had changed water into wine, gave sight to the blind, cured the sick, healed the lepers, turned over the tables in the temple, raised the dead

Lazarus from the grave, and now would feed those who came to listen. These were remarkable hands-the hands of a carpenter, hands that shaped wood and now were shaping lives.

These were also the same hands that would be stretched out on the frame of a cross and would have ten inch spikes driven through them into the wood of the cross, driven by the blows of a hammer wielded by the hand of mankind in our sin.

Although the miracles from the hands of our Lord are significant; it was more importantly the blood from his hands that for us opened the door to our salvation. This horrific death was for us the expression of the depth of God's love for us. Lent is really about understanding the pain and suffering he went through for each of us, in our stead. It is a time for us to strengthen our ties to him in gratitude for his sacrifice.

Lent is also a time for us to measure how then his act of love is appreciated by each of us. We ask ourselves if our faith is indeed growing and if we are taking down the barriers that prevent us from turning to him. What acts of our own hands glorify him? How often are our hands clasped in prayers of penitence? How often are they raised in praise or thanksgiving? How often do they touch those in need or one who is hurting? Do they stir a pot of soup meant to feed those who have no food? Do they clasp the hand of someone who is desperate for a witness of faith? Do they frequently open Holy Scripture for study? Are they generous in the giving of our resources to those in need or even to our church? Do they write a note of support to someone who is suffering? Do they reach back to God when he reaches out to us?

The work of Christ's hands expressed his love in his miracles and most certainly in his hanging on the cross. It makes me wonder if my own hands express Christ's love to others as we seek to serve him and draw closer during this Lenten season. It is often the expression of that love for others that brings us closer to God for in that, our focus is clearly on someone other than ourselves. As we reach out, we remember what our Lord tells us-so as you do unto the least of these, so you do also unto me.

The path for those who follow him is never easy. It is however full of hope and that is why our Lord spent so much time in his early ministry showing his disciples of God and teaching them about His kingdom. He wanted them to know they were in his precious hands and that measure rings true for us today. We also need to place ourselves in God's precious hands, and trust in his mercy, grace and protection. For in his hands we are safe. In his hands we find peace and comfort. In his hands, we learn, grow and draw closer to him.

In a really wonderful Lenten devotional called *These Forty Days* by the Rev. John Henry, the author tries to focus on some of the things in our lives that help us express and understand our relationship to God. It defines Lent through the attributes of life changing efforts such as choosing a relationship with Christ, desiring to change our lives, seeking to follow Christ, and studying his word. He also encourages us to reach out to our neighbor, to seek and give forgiveness, not to judge, to set aside transgression and to be

sincere in our faith. Finally he tries to help us understand God's willingness to help us, our total pardon through the blood of the cross, the new covenant we establish with God through faith, his love and mercy, our hope, and our walking with God. These are the things that we embrace in our journey toward the cross and our desire to be faithful to our Lord.

And this is why we have a breather on Rose Sunday-to see if we truly are putting ourselves in God's hands in full faith and trust. For it is by the power of God, and not by the will of man, that we are renewed. It is by the power of God that we change. It is the power of God that we must rely on to open our hearts and accept his gift to us of hope and salvation. It is by our faith and our full and total trust that we place ourselves in his hands.

Lent should be looked upon as a milestone, not a millstone. It is an opportunity to turn to God and say to him; "Lord, I cannot walk this path alone. In need you in my life and I love you and am grateful for all you have given me in my life. I am in your precious hands. All my trust is in you."

So I leave you with this thought, a short lesson from a soldier that was shared among the clergy from the Dean of our Cathedral in Portland. A lesson that expresses the value of the hands that hold us up-and the relative insignificance of trying to shape our lives with only our own hands because

A basketball in my hands is worth about \$19.
A basketball in Michael Jordan's hands is worth about \$33 million.
A baseball in my hands is worth about \$6.
A baseball in Mark McGuire's hands is worth \$19 million.
A tennis racket is useless in my hands.
A tennis racket in Venus Williams' hands will win a championship.
A staff in my hands will keep away a wild animal.
A staff in Moses' hands will part the mighty sea.
A sling shot in my hands is a kid's toy
A sling shot in David's hand is a mighty weapon.
Two fish and 5 loaves of bread in my hands is a couple of fish sandwiches.
Two fish and 5 loaves of bread in God's hands will feed thousands.
Nails in my hands might produce a birdhouse.
Nails in Jesus Christ's hands will produce salvation for the entire world.

So you see it really depends whose hands it's in. Let us put our concerns, our worries, our fears, our hopes, our dreams, our families, indeed all there is about us, in God's hands because when it come to changing our lives, only his hands have the strength to hold us up and carry us. AMEN