

# THE WORDS IN HIS HANDS

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Mark 15:1-39

April 5, 2009

(THE LITURGY OF THE PASSION)

**Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;  
break forth, O mountains, into singing!  
For the Lord has comforted his people,  
and will have compassion on his suffering ones.**

**But Zion said, “the Lord has forsaken me,  
my Lord has forgotten me.” ✠**

**Can a woman forget her nursing child,  
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?  
Even these may forget.  
yet I will not forget you.  
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.**

A few years ago ... well, a lot of years ago, really (just about a hundred years ago) ... a young woman went to a piano recital with her little boy. It wasn't *his* recital, mind you. Or *hers*. It was a concert, really -- to be given by one of the most gifted and famous

musicians in the world. His name was Paderewski. Have you heard of him? Some people say he was one of the greatest ever. And maybe he was. I don't know. And some say he was a pretty good politician, too. Because, at one time, Paderewski was the Prime Minister of Poland.

And the young woman wanted to go to the concert, of course. Because no one could play Chopin like the great Paderewski, they say. And besides, she wanted her little boy to hear him play. Because he played the piano, too. He had just started taking lessons from the local piano teacher. And she hoped that this would encourage him to practice and maybe inspire him to stick with it.

So the young mother paid for their tickets. And on the night of the concert, they went to the concert hall and found their seats, which were not far from the stage. And they sat there admiring the majestic grand piano that was waiting there quietly on the stage.

And as they were waiting for the concert to begin, she started chatting with some friends who had come

to hear the great pianist, too. And while they were catching up on the latest, the little boy slipped away. I used to do the same thing when I was a kid. I wasn't trying, too, really. It just happened. Still does. Especially on holidays, when the relatives come from hither and yon. (That's with an "a-w" by the way. Hither and *yawn*.)

Anyway, speaking of wandering off, that's what the little boy did. And at eight o'clock, the lights went down, and the spotlight came on. And the audience got quiet. And it wasn't till then that they noticed the little boy on the bench, innocently picking out, "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" on the grand piano. And when his mother saw him there she gasped. And she moved toward him. But before she could reach the stage and retrieve the child, the great pianist appeared and very quickly moved to the keyboard.

And he leaned down to the boy and whispered, "Don't stop. Keep playing." And then he reached down with his left hand and started filling in a bass part. And then he reached to the other side, encircling

the boy, to add a running obbligato. And it was beautiful. The master accompanying the beginner with grace and strength, creating a work of amazing beauty.

There was a great Danish preacher, the same great preacher and teacher who talked about the God-shaped hole within us where nothing will fit but God. Well, he often told a story about an old woman who'd been a seamstress for many years. And she was sure that her "better days" had already come and gone. And one day the pastor of the church knocked on her door. And she invited him in. And she brewed some tea. And they sat together there at the table. And he asked if she would make a new altar cloth for the sanctuary.

It took her by surprise, I think. She couldn't believe the young pastor would ask *her* to do something so *important* as that. "Oh, no, I couldn't," she said. "I'm just not up to that sort of thing anymore. It was twenty years ago that I made the last one," she said. And the pastor gently said, "Yes, I know. And that's

why we need a new one. Please,” he said, “Please make it for us.”

Well ... days went by that turned into weeks. And the weeks turned into months. But there was still no altar cloth to be seen. And no word from the old seamstress. So the pastor went again to the door. And again he asked her to make the cloth. And once again, she resisted. “I’m too old,” she said, “and my hands are so stiff. And I don’t see as well as I did when I was younger,” she said. But the pastor begged her. “Please,” he said, “Please make the cloth for us.”

And the days passed ... and the weeks ... and the months. And then one day the old woman appeared in the doorway of the church. And she had, draped over her arm, a cloth. And the pastor walked with her into the sanctuary. And in the soft, mid-morning light they draped the great altar with the new cloth. And they stepped back to look at it.

And the old woman gasped. “It’s more beautiful than I made it!” she said. And the pastor looked at her and said, “Yes. It’s always that way when we give

something to God.” It was as if Someone, a great master, leaned forward with his hands around hers, to create a work of amazing beauty. ✠

I wonder ... I just wonder if Joseph the Carpenter ever might have done something like that with his son. With Jesus. Standing behind him with his arms circled round him, guiding his hands with grace and strength to make something beautiful. There’s something about that image, that picture, that says something important, I think. And not just about Joseph, but about Jesus.

At Saint Meinrad -- the monastery in southern Indiana -- there’s a long sort of hallway ( a covered walkway) that leads from the abbey (where the monks live) and the church. They call it the slype. And at the end of the slype is a mural -- a wall painting of Joseph and the boy Jesus (who looks to be about eight years old). And Jesus is riding on a little donkey. And Joseph is walking beside him, holding his hand. And across the bottom of the picture it says, “The hand of the humble carpenter leads the Almighty.”

Jesus, Emmanuel, God-in-the-flesh, put himself in the hands of an ordinary man, a parent like any one of you, so that he could take us in his hands and create something amazing and beautiful in us.

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I don't know why, but I've been thinking about Jesus' hands these past few days. Maybe it's because of that movie I watched again the other night, and that heart-wrenching scene where the guards drive the nails into his hands. Or maybe it's because of the

picture on the wall of the study across from my desk that I see every time I look up. It's a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross .... And it isn't pretty, at all. Because Jesus is twisted and wounded and dying, his hands nailed to the cross. And at first it looks as though his fingers are twisted and writhing in pain. But if you look a little deeper, you begin to see that he is reaching up, even with the nails in his hands. He's reaching up to God in prayer. And he's reaching out to the world -- to embrace us and lift us up to God.

So I've been thinking about that a good bit this week. About those hands. For with those human hands -- the hands of a carpenter, mind you -- God touched the eyes of the blind and gave them sight. And he embraced lepers and prostitutes. And he welcomed and greeted and even broke bread with sinners. And with those same hands, he opened the scroll -- the Word of the Lord -- and read from Isaiah: **The Spirit of the Lord is upon me [because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those**

## **who are oppressed, and proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.]**

He took five cakes of barley bread into his hands and blessed them and broke them and gave them to his disciples to feed more than five thousand people. And with those same humble, human hands Jesus took the hand of a little girl who had died and made her live again in his love.

From the day he was baptized he did this. All through his ministry he healed and taught, and touched and embraced the world with God's love and God's grace.

And then says Mark, on this day we call Palm Sunday, he rode into the Holy City not like a great and honored king or even some distinguished head of state, but humble and lowly he came. Riding on a donkey, a farm animal, mind you. And yet, he was greeted by people shouting "Hosanna!" and waving palm branches -- the age-old symbol of victory. It was almost like rolling out the red carpet for Jesus. Because he was the One, they thought -- the One who

could turn things round right again, and give the Holy Land (as we call it) back to God's people.

But the Kingdom he came to build wasn't that sort of kingdom, really. But it was God's Kingdom. A kingdom of mercy and peace. A kingdom where the first would be last and the last would be first. Where the humble servant would be the greatest and the greatest would be the servant of all. That was the kingdom he came to build.

And on Thursday evening, the eve of Passover, Jesus knelt like a servant -- and with his hands he washed his disciples' feet and dried them with a towel. And there in the upper room, as they shared the Passover meal, Jesus took bread and blessed it and broke it and said, "This is my body which is broken for you." And he took the cup and lifted it up and said, "This is my blood, poured out for you. Do this," he said. "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." And when they had sung some hymns that evening, he went out to the Mount of Olives, and knelt down, and folded his hands in prayer.

And you know what happened. While he was praying, the temple guards came and took him away. And they had a church trial that night ... and found him guilty ... and said, “He deserves to die.” But mind you, the church (or the Temple, I guess) couldn’t do that on its own. So they took him to someone who could. But Pilate (the Governor) said, “He doesn’t deserve to die. What has he done? He isn’t evil.”

But they shouted louder and louder, “Let him be crucified....

Pilate tried to reason with them. He thought if he let them choose between Jesus and a murderer, they’d let him go. But they didn’t. The chief priests and the scribes had the crowd all stirred up. And they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

So they made him carry the cross he would die on through the streets of the city to a hill they called Golgotha or Calvary (in Latin), which means “place of the skull.” And there they took his hands -- the hands that had touched and healed and given so much -- and they nailed them to the cross. And that painting on the

wall across from my desk tells the story right,, I think. For even though he was dying, even though he was hurting and suffering in body and spirit, he was reaching up to God in prayer that we (you and I) might be forgiven. And through those pierced, wounded, bleeding hands, God was reaching out to embrace all the world and you and me in his love.

A few years ago, three young musicians wrote a song about this. They called themselves Nickel Creek. And the song tells a story about a little boy who wanted to do something kind and good for his mother. He didn't know what, really. Just something special. And then he noticed the roses in their front yard. Beautiful roses -- roses his mother had tended with patience and care. So that was it. He ran to get some roses to give to his mom.

And when the little boy came rushing into the house, she looked at him -- not knowing, of course, that her roses were doomed. But it didn't matter, really. Because all she could see were the thorns in his hands and the tears rolling down his cheeks as she

tended his wounds. And the song says, “she knew it was love. It was what she could understand. He was showing his love... and that’s how he hurt his hands.”

Well ... years later, her son remembered that night with the thorns and the roses. And he remembered sitting there on his mother’s lap with her arms wrapped all around him. And in her hands she was holding a bible. And she opened the bible and read to him. And as she was reading, he noticed a picture there in her bible. It was a picture of Jesus. And he turned to her and said, “Mommy, look! He’s got some scars just like me!” ✕ And he knew. When he saw the scars he knew it was love. It was what he could understand. Jesus was showing his love... and that’s how he hurt his hands.

Later on in his life, the boy (of course) became a young man. And as it says in the song, “his number came up.” And he went off to war in some faraway land. And it wasn’t long till he was gone.... For as the song says, “he gave to a friend what he learned from

the cross.” He gave his life to save someone else, dying that they might live.

And this is how the song and how the story ends ... “But they knew it was love, it was one they could understand. He was showing his love ... and that’s how he hurt his hands.

And isn’t that what happened at Golgotha? Isn’t that what happened on the cross? He said it himself that night when he was at the table with all his disciples: Greater love has no one than this -- than to lay down his life for his friends. [And that’s who you are ... you are his friends.]

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This is the word which is given for you. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

*Benen, OblSB*

