

Sermon for Sunday, April 30, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"THE HAND OF JESUS NO. 4 - THE HAND WITH THE HOLE IN IT"

St. John 20:24-31

Text: "Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands, and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.'"

St. John 20:27

Today is the fourth in our series of sermons that deal with occasions when the hands of Jesus are mentioned. In the first sermon, we spoke of Jesus stretching forth his hand to heal. In the second we talked about Peter walking on the water to meet Jesus, but in the wind and waves of the storm, he lost his courage. It was then that the Bible tells us that Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him. In the sermon last week we talked about the hand with the multicolored fingers, for Jesus invites all men to be brothers with him and sons with God. And when that happens, all his brothers are brothers with one another. Today we are going to talk about Doubting Thomas. When Jesus first appeared to the disciples, Thomas was not present. When the others told him that Jesus had appeared to them, he could not believe it. "Unless I put my finger in the nail print of his hand," said Thomas, "I will not believe." So it was, when Jesus came again to the disciples in that upper room, Thomas was there. It was then that Jesus stretched out his hand to Thomas and said, "Put your finger here, and see my hands..."

Let me call to our attention some things about Jesus before his crucifixion. Notice first the human qualities of Jesus. Did you ever stop to think that when Jesus took our human form, he experienced our humanness? For example, he got hungry and thirsty just as we do. He shivered from the cold and perspired from the heat. He had our emotions, for it hurt him when people rejected him, he felt righteous indignation when God's temple ceased to be a house of prayer and was turned into a trade market. He felt sorrow when he wept at the tomb of Lazarus and when he wept over Jerusalem. He showed joy when people such as the woman of the street repented and turned again to God. He showed kindness and consideration at a wedding when the wine ran out. He demonstrated regrets when the rich young ruler went away from him. He even knew our temptations for after those forty days in the wilderness, the Bible says that the Devil left him, but only for a season...for a brief time. And, you know, I suspect that late in his ministry the temptation was very great to be and do what people wanted.

Yet, after Easter all of that was changed. His humanity underwent a radical transformation. In some strange way we do not yet understand he appeared to the disciples in a room that was locked. Even his appearance had changed. Remember how, when the woman in the garden saw him on the resurrection morning, she thought he was the gardener? And remember how the two men on the road to Emmaus did not recognize him? It was only when he blessed the bread at supper and broke it that they realized who he was. So the very countenance of Jesus was different.

Another thing that was different was his subjection to pain and suffering. When we read the story of the crucifixion, how they whipped him until his back was a mass of mutilated flesh, of how they pressed the sharp thorns down on his brow until the blood ran down his face, of the nails being driven into his hands and feet, of the wretched agony he experienced while his body slowly died--when we read of that we are overcome with the enormity of his pain and hurt and suffering. Yet, when Jesus stretches out his hand to Thomas, the wound is still there, but the pain is gone. He is free of pain and suffering.

Yes, the human qualities of Jesus had now changed. And you know, I think that is how it is going to be with us. When we are raised to eternal life, all of our human qualities will be transformed. All of our deformities, all of our hurts and pains and sorrows will be gone. We will be like Jesus. We will be glorified and our bodies will be fully redeemed. That's going to be a fantastic experience, isn't it? Our bodies are going to be perfected just like Jesus.

But not only had his humanness been transformed, notice secondly that the power of Jesus was different, too. Before crucifixion, Jesus had certain limitations. Now, it is true that during his ministry he performed certain miracles. Incidentally, I don't think we have begun to discover what God can do and wants to do through us as well. Remember what Jesus once said? He said, "The works that I do, greater works than these shall you do." But in spite of his miracles, Jesus had some limitations. For one thing, he had a physical limitation. A human body can only take so much and time and time again the Bible tells us that Jesus withdrew simply to rest. Again, there were some things he could not do. The Bible tells us that in certain places he could do no mighty work there because of the unbelief of the people.

And did you ever stop to think how many people there were who never got to see Jesus? He was limited to a small little area around Jerusalem and even there, not all of the people there got to meet him. There were literally millions of people in the world when Jesus walked the earth who never heard the sound of his voice, never felt the caress of his healing hand, never saw the winsome look of love in his eye, never knew the kindness of his smile. And how that must have lodged like a knife in the heart of Jesus! So many who needed him, so few he could reach.

But after the resurrection, all of that was changed. Now God's power in Jesus had been loose in the world. Do you remember how Jesus put it? The Bible says that he breathed on his disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." And now the power of Jesus was at work in human hearts. Men who loved him were to go to the ends of the earth to show his love for others, to share with them the good news of God's forgiveness. Did you ever stop to think that you are the emissary of Jesus? God has put the power of the Spirit in our hearts and he calls us to go to the whole world to tell men of his love. You are his eyes, to look in compassion upon a suffering world; you are his lips, to speak to men of forgiveness; you are his hands, to reach out in help to those who are helpless; you are his feet, to go to the end of the earth for him. Yes, the power of Jesus had changed. Now it is in the hearts of all who believe in him.

Another thing that had changed was his relationship to his disciples. Before, they were often separated from him when he withdrew to pray, or when he went on a journey. I think the thing that hurt the most at the cross was the knowledge that they would never share fellowship with him again. O, how lonely they were! Never to hear the sound of his voice, to feel the touch of his hand--how terrible it was. But now, after resurrection, he says to them, "Lo, I am with you always." And isn't that true in your life? You can have the presence of Jesus in your heart. It was in the awareness of that presence, in the knowledge that he went with them, that they traveled to the ends of the earth to tell of him.

Yet, the point of our sermon today is this: there are two ways in which Jesus did not change. The first way in which there was no change was this: the hand of Jesus still had a hole in it. Did you ever stop to think of that? Jesus was resurrected, his body was glorified, but his body still bore the marks of the cross. How much did Jesus suffer for you and me? How big was the price he paid for your sins and mine? Dr. Harold Ockenga, President of Gordon Conwell Seminary, in an article entitled, "Understanding Calvary", writes,

"Though there is much that the believer understands about Calvary, there is much he will never understand. Christians will never know the depths of suffering which Christ Jesus endured on the cross. We know that he tasted death and what a death it was. No believer will ever die the kind of death that Jesus died on the cross. We know that he endured the curse of the broken law and that that curse will never rest upon the believer. We know that he carried the wrath of God which was holiness in motion against the sin of humanity which had been held back and dammed up through the ages and then released to overwhelm Jesus on the cross. It was this that overwhelmed Jesus and broke his heart. No believer will ever be able to understand the depths of such suffering through which Jesus passed."

Yes, when Jesus stretched his hand out to Thomas, it still bore the mark of the nail--the price it cost to pay for your sins and mine. When you get to heaven and Jesus stretches out his hand to welcome you, it will still bear the mark of the nail, a hand with a hole in it--the price it took to pay for our sins. All time and eternity will not change those hands--the cost of our redemption.

The second way in which Jesus did not change was this: he will not force you to believe. During his earthly ministry there were many times when men turned away from him, rejected him. He never forced a man to believe. He stretched out his hand to Thomas--that hand with the terrible wound--and he asked him not to be faithless, but to believe. But he did not force him. Thomas still could have said, "No."

The response that Thomas made that day was a step he had to make for himself. Nobody--not even Jesus--could make it for him. Only he could cry out for himself, "My Lord and my God."

Yes, the risen Jesus was different in many ways. But for all eternity those hands will bear the awful wounds--the print of the nails--the cost of your redemption and mine. Today, as he did that day for Thomas, Jesus stretches out his hands to us. He cries out, "see my hands...be not faithless, but believing." Yes, "see my hands..."--and the next step is ours.