

Guided by Gentle Hands
The Rev. Jeffrey Clawson

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At birth each of us was delivered because someone stretched out their hands. Each of us left a space that had become too small and made it safely into this world. Most likely the way it happened was someone stretched out two hands and gently held our head as we moved from the womb to open space and took our first breath.

Last week thinking about my birth, I wanted know more about the hands that brought me into the world. Who was it? Such an important moment for me – but I don't remember a thing. I called my mother a couple of days ago. I asked her if she was there when I was born. According to her story she was. She told me it was Dr. MacDonald who delivered me. I am glad he showed up for work that day.

There is something so atavistic, something so elemental, something so human about hands holding us and gently guiding us into the world. And perhaps there is some memory of this event in the most ancient part of each of our brains. It must be consciously inaccessible but would hold this moment. And perhaps this is why the hands of the physician, the priest, and the healer seem to channel healing power. And the touch of their hands to the head seems so important in healing.

Could this be why the leper came begging and knelt at Jesus' feet for his touch? He knew Jesus was a healer. We can too easily tame Jesus by making Jesus merely moral teacher or such a lofty savior of the entire world that we cannot see how Jesus relates to *us*. In healing the leper Jesus related so personally to the leper and gave him the healing he asked for. Jesus is a healer; Jesus is our healer.

But Jesus did not receive what he asked for from the leper, "say nothing to anyone". The man healed went and told everyone. Jesus would not be able to continue healing, preaching and teaching. He would be cornered and trapped. And once trapped he changed his approach. He then offered himself as a sacrifice as he stretched out his arms upon the cross. And the hands that channeled healing power were nailed to the cross. Religion without love and empire that demanded complete allegiance conspired to destroy Jesus. But the same power, the power of the Holy Spirit that healed the leper and so many others though Jesus would not allow Jesus to be destroyed. Jesus was raised from the dead and entered life in a new way: a life without limits.

Jesus then became a person without limits and then was able to work through us in his work of healing. Through our hands Jesus touches others. Those who are born into the Church and those who need healing are touched by our hands. But not just our hands. Jesus touches people through us.

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At baptism people are born into the church as the priest pours water with her hands upon the candidate's head, and then with a hand on the person's head marks the sign of the cross.

In the Eucharist bread and wine are touched by the priest and somehow Christ touches the bread and wine as well. And we receive spiritual nourishment and healing.

But you don't have to be a priest for Christ to touch others through your hands. I think of the shawl ministry. Through the hands of women in the knitting group Christ touches others who need healing. The stories of how these shawls offer comfort and healing are truly wonderful.

Since these shawls comfort and heal I was thinking wouldn't it be even more effective if we had shawl making machines in the building to make even more shawls? Of course this is absurd. It is absurd because they are made by hand. It is not just the shawl that offers comfort and healing. Through the shawls the hands of the women in the knitting group touch others. They offer a healing touch to the victims of disease, accidents and violence. And through the hands of these women in the knitting group Christ touches others with healing through these shawls.

And I can think of so many other ministries here that touch people with the healing touch of Christ. By taking a few unrelated objects the Godly Play teachers use their hands to tell stories and then the Word of God becomes alive to children. And Christ touches hearts with the Word of God that heals the brokenness of the human condition. By taking fresh food and kitchen utensils, hands prepare meals for those who are hungry and lack food. And Christ touches people with healing and compassion. And there are so many other examples.

And without any program our hands reach out and touch those who need healing and compassion. I remember that Saturday afternoon years ago that my hands pushed the wheelchair my grandmother sat in as I took her from the hospital to my house. She would never go to her home again. I remember how my hands shook as I pushed that wheelchair. They shook because I didn't think I knew how to take care of someone so sick. But I did it not because I knew how but because I had compassion. You have done that too. Each of you has a story of how your hands became the source of healing and compassion to someone you love. And think of this: through your hands Christ touched that one you love. Yes, Christ touched someone you love through your hands.

At birth each of us left a space that had become too small and made it safely into this world because someone stretched out their hands. Two hands gently, gently guided us from a place too small into this world.

But this world is too small because of sin and the power of sin. Each of us longs for a world that is bigger. Each of us was created for a world much bigger. And there will come that moment when it will be entirely too small for each of us. At that moment the heart will take its last beat and we will take our last breath. And at that moment the

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hands of Jesus will touch us. We will recognize Jesus by those nail scarred hands – limitless hands because of the resurrection and nailed scarred as proof of his limitless love - and they will gently, gently guide each of us from this limited world into the Kingdom of God. Limitation will give way to limitless love.

And from limitation, and from disappointments, and from heartaches we shall be healed.