

We use our hands to pick up and hold objects, to eat, to touch, to feel heat and texture. We also use our hands for communication. For blind people, hands are used as eyes in the reading of braille. For deaf people, hands are like mouth and ears through the medium of Sign Language. And in this age of Information Technology, our hands are the main way in which we interact with our electronic devices: whether it is a keyboard, a mouse or a touchscreen phone. We all use hands, but most of the time we take them for granted without paying any attention.

So, today I invite you to take a moment to look at your hands and reflect. If you are holding anything, then put it down. Hold out your hands—palm side up. Look at the shape of your fingers. Perhaps there is a mark made by a ring. Or a scar caused by an accident. Or a callous caused by years of hard work. If your eyesight is good, then you may see those tiny ridges of skin called “fingerprints.”

What do they tell about you —your age, your experiences, the kind of work you do, the scars and the stories of your life? Do you like your hands? If yes, why? If no, why not? Preacher and author Barbara Brown Taylor writes that our hands do not lie and tell a story. Every hand is different, and every hand has a story to tell.

One of the most remarkable things about serving communion is the variety of hands that are outstretched before me. As I serve the communion, I see all manner of hands. These hands tell your stories, of the garden you have planted and the children you have fed. They talk about the kind of work you do and how you use your time. And I know that there are even more stories that your hands are not telling, about tears you have wiped, wounds you have healed, about what you have built and what you have broken down.

A pair of hands tells a story. The hands in the Gospel are not exceptional—Mary’s hands holding her baby tightly as they fled into Egypt; Hands of the fishermen pulling in their nets; Hands of the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears; Hands that grasped at the fringe of Jesus’ garment to be freed from a lifetime of physical ailment; Judas’ hands of betrayal; Pilate’s guilty hands that were washed of responsibility; Hands that waved palms and hands that held whips; Hands that nailed him up and hands that carefully took him down, cleaned him and buried him.

As the story passes on to us, these hands become our hands. We receive the body of Christ in our open hands. The hands of strangers and friends are stretched out in like fashion. Everyone gets exactly what he needs: no one has more; no one has less. The body of Christ, the bread of heaven, is given for all in the same way.

Jesus' hands will be pierced through with nails. His hands will always bear the mark of what was done to them. His hands will tell a story, the story of how his body was broken for us. In addition to the story of Jesus communing with his friends, we will remember the story of brokenness and human error every time we open our own hands to receive that broken body. With our hands, we remember the story of Jesus and ours.

Like our forebears who sat at supper with Christ, however, we approach this table a little confused, a little apprehensive, a little guilty, a little entitled, and a little self-righteous. But when we kneel down and turn our palms upward, asking for the bread which will feed us, for just this moment, we are supplicants together, equally implicated, equally beloved. Our hands tell our stories, and our hands, outstretched, show that we are reaching toward belief. Just for a moment.

And when that moment ends, our hands go on to other things—herding children, fiddling with ties, jingling keys. We go back to our pews, back to our thoughts and our lives, and start thinking about what happens next because what happens next is our response to what has been given into our hands.

When we take the bread into our hands and then into our bodies, we fill ourselves to go out into the world. We prepare ourselves for the work our hands and hearts have to do as the followers of Jesus Christ. We stand up and look to the future, getting ready for the journey ahead, regardless of whether we know what is to come. Christ delivered himself to us, into our hands, and now it is our job to carry him out into the world. The next part of the story is in our hands.