

*Hands, Feet and Hearts based on Luke 24:36-43*  
Preached by Rev. Adrienne Carr, April 22, 2012;  
First Congregational Church UCC, Burlington, VT

This month's National Geographic features an article called *The Common Hand*, written by Carl Zimmer. (Nat. Geographic, May, 2012, p.98.) Zimmer begins by writing, "The hand is where the mind meets the world." He goes on to say, "*We humans use our hands to build fires and sew quilts, to steer airplanes, to write, dig, remove tumors, pull a rabbit out of a hat. The human brain, with its open-ended creativity, may be the thing that makes our species unique. But without hands, all the grand ideas we concoct would come to nothing but a very long to-do list.*" Zimmer goes on to describe the miraculous construction that is the hand and what it can do. But lest we develop swelled heads from our uniqueness, Zimmer writes of the hands or the remnants of hands that are a part of the skeletal structure of Chimps and bats and elephants and dolphins. With his words, he reminds me that all creation is interrelated and that each element of creation is a miracle in itself.

His article caught my attention in light of today's Gospel passage that focuses on the hands and feet of the Risen Christ. Luke writes his Resurrection account in a manner that is slightly different from the other evangelists. John, you remember, singles out poor doubting Thomas, requiring him to take a close look at the marks of the nails and place his fingers in the sword wound in Jesus' side.

Luke's Resurrection appearance passage is written, I think, with more gentleness, more affirming care than those of the others. In fact, the sequence from Luke begins on the road to Emmaus. Two disciples, probably a couple, still in shock at the death of their Master, left the other grieving disciples in Jerusalem to walk back to their home in Emmaus. As they were walking, a stranger came up beside them and listened to their grief-laden account of the death of Jesus. At the end of their journey, they invited the stranger into their home for dinner and a safe place to spend the night. At their supper table, the stranger took the bread, blessed, broke it and gave it to them. At that moment they knew that the stranger was Jesus. Overjoyed by their encounter, they immediately rushed back to Jerusalem and told the others of what they had experienced. Even as they spoke, Jesus was quietly there with all of them. Understanding their fear and hesitation at things mysterious and divine, and to prove that he was real, Jesus showed them his hands and feet and further assuring them of the reality of his presence, ate a piece of fish. There was no recrimination of lack of faith or singling out doubters by Jesus in this passage. There was simply a healing of broken hearts and a moment of joyful reunion.

Hands, feet and hearts tell a poignant story. The Risen Christ walked with the couple to Emmaus. As he spoke, they felt their hearts warmed by the voice and the words of Christ. But they only knew him in the breaking of the bread – in his taking the bread in his hands, blessing it and dividing it up for them. Then, in the room where his friends were gathered and so surrounded by the beloved disciples, Christ showed them his feet, perhaps still dusty from the road and his hands that reached out for a piece of fish. In that company, fear was abandoned and life proclaimed, Jesus' and theirs

Was there a purpose in Jesus showing them his hands and feet other than to see the wounds as proof that he had hung on the cross and died? Or was there another, visual, message that Jesus intended for his disciples? When they saw those hands, did they recall all of the times that Jesus touched deaf or blind or crippled or ill people and healed them? As he ate the fish with his hands, did they remember the shared loaves and fish; the arms upraised to still the stormy sea; the banquets, where they sat, surrounded by Pharisees, Tax Collectors and merchants? Did they remember tables in the Temple being overturned and the blessing and breaking of the bread at that last supper? And as they listened to him, did they feel their own hearts coming back to life?

Hands convey so much. A few weeks ago Neil and I had the gift of a few hours to spend with our not quite two year old grandson. I took him for a walk and his hand in mine, we had a eloquent discussion on cars and trucks, big truck – blue car. As I held his little hand, I felt such a surge of protectiveness for Nathan that I was actually surprised at the emotion. Hands can do that, can't they? A warm handshake, a pat on the back, wrapping and giving a gift all say without words, "You are important to me. "I care for you." "I love you."

Hands and feet, when used to provide love and care become the words of Christ put into action. Is this a subtle reminder from Christ that we are, each of us, the hands and feet and heart of Christ in our little pieces of the world? Is this focus by Christ on his hands and feet a bequest to us from him? Do we, each follower of Christ, inherit the mission to go forth into the world and to use hands and feet and hearts to continue to feed and heal; to walk toward, not away from pain and suffering and to grow hearts large enough to love even when love is difficult to maintain?

Today is Earth Day. Here in this Sanctuary, we call this Integrity of Creation Sunday. No matter what we call it, this day is a yearly reminder of the beauty and the fragility of our mother earth. In many areas right now, hands and feet are being put to work to plant trees and clean up trash. People are pledging to do some of those small deeds that when counted together make a great impact. Deeds like turning off unnecessary lights or keeping the heat down or taking public transportation more often or combining chores to use less gas in the car.

When I reflect on that beauty and fragility of our earth, I am always drawn to the first chapter of Genesis both because of the lyrical quality of the descriptions and because of the blessing that God bestowed on every act of creation, "And God saw that it was good." At the conclusion of the chapter, God created human beings and placed them in charge of all the rest of creation, not to dominate but to act in God's name to care for and to protect all the magnificence of nature that God called very good.

We humans have a sad but perhaps inevitable record of inadequate care for God's creation. As, through countless millennia, we have multiplied and spread we have upset balances everywhere. The need to support ourselves, to house our populations, to heat our homes, to feed and clothe ourselves, to develop means of transportation has grown exponentially with each new generation. Today, as we face the reality of nature out of balance, we begin to understand how far creation has strayed from that original blessing.

Centuries of hands and feet heedlessly and ignorantly tearing apart fragile eco-systems; centuries of hearts set on goals of power and wealth; centuries of creative minds misunderstanding the negative costs of creativity have all contributed to the pain that all creation suffers today.

Call it Earth Day or call it Integrity of Creation Sunday, it doesn't really matter what we call this day of awareness; what does matter is that we the human community stand on our feet, reach out our hands, use every creative synapse in our brains and pour out of our hearts an ocean of protective love for ourselves, our children's children's children and for each unique miracle that is creation.

If, today, Jesus was asked to answer the question: "What is the greatest Commandment?" Might He respond: "You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength; and, you shall love and care for all that lives: humans, animals, birds, sea creatures, plants and trees; all that together is your world. For in loving and caring for all that lives, you love and care for yourself and your common future."

In 1855, Chief Seattle of the Dwumish Tribe whose territory included the area around what is now Seattle, Washington, was quoted as saying: *Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.* The chief may or may not have uttered those words but what is said is profound.

Hands, feet and hearts – we humans are the present moment. We are the hope for the future. We are nature's caregivers appointed by God. May we embrace that role, and through the commitments we make both to the present and to the future, be the catalyst that brings the blessing to fulfillment: And God sees that it is very good. Amen.