

Hands That Save

When my 26-year-old son was a bit younger, we would head down to Minneapolis to take in a couple of Minnesota Twin's baseball games. They would play Wednesday night and Thursday morning, which made it easy for us to see two games.

One time, when Michael was about 9 or 10 years old, we were hustling from our parking spot to the stadium, and he reached up to grab my hand, which he had not done for probably 3-4 years. I asked him, "How come?" and he said, "I love you."

Besides this being a really nice story and true, I share it with you at a time when we are not holding or even shaking hands, because of Covid-19, the dreaded coronavirus. Isn't it strange how such a wonderful thing as holding hands might be harmful?

But not when it comes to Jesus' hands. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus offers his hands, he holds out his hands to his disciples, and tells them to take hold of them, to touch his hands, to feel the nail holes, which have indeed saved them.

That's right, the hands of Jesus, once nailed to the cross, dripping with blood, are saving hands for the disciples, for us, for the world. His hands, hands which formed mountains, healed lepers, raised a little girl from death to life, also save us in every way.

What a beautiful story? The disciples were shut in the very same room where they shared Jesus' last supper. They were isolated, socially distant from the world, because they were afraid for their lives. Does that sound just a little like our lives today?

Now, the disciples were isolating from certain authorities. They were afraid, they might want to kill them, as they killed Jesus. We,

however, are afraid of and isolating ourselves from a contagious novel virus, which has killed 161,000 human beings.

Notice how Jesus suddenly appears in the room with them to say, "Peace be with you." Without warning, without using a door, Jesus enters the room, he breaks their social isolation, and he says, "Let there be peace on earth, and let me begin with you."

The disciples are startled. You see, they believe Jesus is dead. They don't believe in the resurrection – yet. But then, the Lord shows them his hands, he shows them the holes in his hands, and he invites them to touch his hands and the holes.

Most importantly, however, Jesus invites them to believe. Jesus invites them to believe he is risen, to believe God's love is stronger than death, and to believe now as a resurrected Lord, he will be able to be with them, alongside them, to help them – forever.

You know, Jesus invites you to believe the same thing. In fact, right now, as you are shut into your house alone or with your family, isolating from your neighbors and from the coronavirus, the Lord enters your house, breaking your social isolation.

Without warning, without using a door, without asking permission, Jesus has entered the place you occupy right now, he has entered the very life you are living now, and he says, "Peace be with you", meaning that he, the risen Jesus, has come to help you.

Despite the coronavirus, Jesus has entered into your isolation to give you peace for this hard and stressful time. This peace is to help you, this peace is to forgive you, this peace is to protect you from Covid-19, this peace is the promise of a bright future.

I loved my dad's hands. He was a teacher, but he also worked in a fresh produce warehouse on weekends and drove truck in the

summer when school was off. So, he had working hands, rough and calloused hands, but I think for me, nice to touch.

My dad had and still has a way of using his hands to grab your neck and face, to hold you close, so he can give you a kiss, even for his me, his son. I still love the feel of those hands on my neck and face. My dad's hands still make me feel safe and loved.

So, it is for you with Jesus' hands. The same hands he offered to the disciples, with holes from the nails which held him to the cross, those hands are near you right now, reaching out for you, willing to grab hold of you, able to help you through this hard time.

In fact, Jesus invites you today to look with eyes of faith and see his hands where you are right now. He invites you to take hold of his hands, and to believe they reach out to you with love, to keep you safe, to lead you through this day and every day of life.

See those hands, one pair of hands, Jesus' hands, reaching for you right now. Hear the Lord calling out to you with the words, "Peace be with you." Believe that Jesus is risen, and that God's love is stronger than the coronavirus, and stronger than death.

And certainly, believe the risen Lord Jesus and his saving hands, are with you right now. He and his saving hands will lead you, through all fear of this virus, through all social isolation, through all economic hardship, through all struggles to come.

Even as you are practicing social distancing, Jesus is not far away. Jesus is not 6 feet away from you. He is much closer to you, as close as your breath, as close as your beating heart. He is so close he has his saving hands around you right now. Right now!

So, you are safe, you are loved, and you are saved. Amen.