

From the Community Pulpit
“Hands on the Table”

Text: Luke 22:14-23
Sermon by Dr. Robert Lee Hill
Maundy Thursday, April 5, 2007
Preached at the Maundy Thursday Noon Service
of
Colonial United Church of Christ
Prairie Village, Kansas

◆◆◆ Community Christian Church ◆◆◆ 4601 Main◆◆◆ Kansas City, Missouri ◆◆◆ 64112 ◆◆◆
◆◆◆ 816.561.6531 ◆◆◆ www.community-christian.org ◆◆◆

Text: Luke 22:14-23 – 14 When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. 15 He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 20 And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. 21 But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. 22 For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" 23 Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

My strong and sincere thanks to John Tamilio for the invitation to be part of your Maundy Thursday services here at Colonial United Church of Christ. Your fame as a congregation of courage and kindness has come over our way at Community, and it is a privilege to speak from this esteemed pulpit and share worship with this good, good pastor, and fine poet. With a pastor like John and given your shared work together as people and pastor, truly brightening this corner of Kansas and indeed the Midwest, your future shall remain promising and your ministrations to one and all true blessings.

And to Jimmy Mohler, and Tom and Ivy Manning, Community members *extraordinaire*, let me to say I am delighted to see you. And I would echo – once more! – the words of Psalm 139 and also say, *“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into the*

heavenly pulpit of Community Christian Church, thou art there. If I make my place in Washington, D.C., thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost locale of Colonial United Church of Christ in Prairie Village, Kansas, even there thy hand shall greet me and thy countenance shall meet me!"

Soren Kierkegaard tells a parable of a community of ducks waddling off to duck church to hear the duck preacher. The duck preacher spoke eloquently of how God had given the ducks wings with which to fly. With these wings there was nowhere the ducks could not go, there was no God-given task the ducks could not accomplish. With those wings they could soar into the presence of God himself. Shouts of "Amen" were quacked throughout the duck congregation. At the conclusion of the service, the ducks left, commenting on what a wonderful message they had heard – *and waddled all the way back home*. May such a fate for us be avoided here at Colonial United Church of Christ, in Prairie Village, Kansas , today!

Nearly two thousand years after the first Lord's Supper, we still break the loaf and share the cup in remembrance of the One who let Himself be broken that we might be made whole. During the enriching rituals of Holy Week, real life is shared, actual agony is experienced, and the way is finally prepared for Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. This being Maundy Thursday, the focus for the day is, of course, the Lord's Supper. In order to experience the sacred feast of the Lord's Supper with a new sense of vividness, I want to draw our attention to the words of Jesus at the conclusion of the Lord's Supper, according to Luke's account.

Luke is alone among the gospels in telling of Jesus' after-dinner speech. Luke is a skilled writer and sets up the disciples, and us 21st century

followers, by waiting until after the institution of the Lord's Supper for the shocking revelation he will share. The subject of his after-dinner speech? Nothing comical, entertaining, or sentimental at all. It's all about betrayal. About his betrayer Jesus says, "*But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table.*" (Luke 22:21).

These are hard words to hear. Hard because they are so *intimate*: "... *with me...*" Hard, too, because they are so *personal*: "... *his hand....*" Hard, as well, because they are so *insinuating*: after Jesus' declaration about betrayal, the text says "they began to ask one another which one it could be who would do this."

But I suspect these words are hard for us to hear – as hard for us to hear as they were for the first disciples to hear – because they are also *true, so applicably, directly true* about all of Jesus' followers.

So let us do as Jesus suggested and see the hands on the table. Obviously Jesus refers to Judas, for that is the one who will turn Jesus over to the authorities. Yet are there not other hands on the table, the hands of those who will also abandon Jesus in his time of need?

See Peter's hand, apparently a strong hand that makes flamboyant gestures, yet it will shrink away in denial three times before the cock crows.

See Thomas' hand, whose sense of touch is so acute that it will numb his heart's capacity to believe until he can actually put his hand into Jesus' wounds.

See the weary hands of the disciples when they fail to remain steadfast as Jesus prays. Indeed, in other accounts of Jesus' final hours after the supper,

he states that the disciples "will all fall away" and that they "*will be scattered ... and leave me alone.*"

But we see other hands on the table as well. A question for anyone who breaks bread in remembrance of Jesus can be "What sort of hands do I bring to the Lord's table?"

Some of us have "*overly pious*" hands, so desperately clinging to heavenly religiosity that we can do no earthly good.

Some of us have "*anti-praying*" hands, so focused on the things of this world – and all of its attendant grime and grit and grunge – that we grow exhausted and dispirited because we have not taken enough time to be with God in quiet and stillness.

Some of us have "*cynical, all-knowing, condescending*" hands. With a flip of the wrist, we dismiss the world's grossness, our leaders grievous mistakes, and all untoward actions with a simple, "*Oh I knew that. Yeah I could have told you that would happen. They're all the same. It's all rotten. All the time.*"

Some of us have "*our-hands-are-the-best-kind-of-hands*" hands, defined by the illusion of supremacy – by melanin content (or lack thereof), by youthfulness (or lack thereof), or by wrinkles and age-spots (or lack thereof), denying all the while the truth on which Paul and the members of the early Church would stake their lives, that in Christ we are all one.

On yet another hand, some of us have "*indifferent*" hands, overestimating the power of the shadowy places in the world, and underestimating our own God-given capacities, turning away from the world, and often our lives, with a "*Woe-is-me,-what-can-one-person-ever-do?*" shrug of our souls. And when we do this we neglect to respond to Christ's daring invitation to grasp the illuminating power of light and goodness and hope.

Now before we grow despondent, please know there is good news about all this hands business. Yes, we agree that Jesus refers to Judas' betraying hands, and Peter's and Thomas' and the rest of the disciples hands, and also our own hands. But let us also remember one other fact. All of those hands, all of our hands, are not set forth on the Lord's Table alone. Remember, remember, remember – for that is what this day is for – our hands are *with His hands* on the table. While our hands can betray and can doubt and be overly pious and anti-prayer and cynical and exclusive and indifferent, Christ's hands are there for us. As Jesus was "the man for others," as Bonhoeffer would describe him, His hands are for us. And how wondrous those hands are: healing hands, hoping hands, honoring hands, forgiving hands, encouraging hands. Hands of generosity and welcome, hands of hospitality and justice, hands of grace and faithfulness. So faithful are Christ's hands that we come to a new understanding of the phrase "*saved by faith*": *we are saved by God's faith*, by God's continuously renewing, resurrecting faith in His children. And God in Christ offers his saving hands on the Table with an ultimate purpose and hope. As Christ's hands overcome excruciating loss and pain, so shall ours. As Christ's hands triumphed over the world's negative detractors, so shall ours. As Christ's hands rose in resurrecting power to bless the world once more, so shall ours.

Thanks be to God for Christ's hands – pierced and crucified and yet soon to be resurrected – which redeem all the other hands on the table.

Prayer. We give you thanks, O God, for the broken loaf that makes us whole, for the shared cup that fills us to completeness, for accepting us as we are, hands and all.

AMEN.