

From the Community Pulpit
Palm Sunday, April 5, 2009

"Hands on the Table"

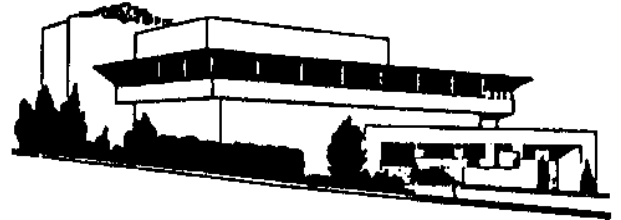
Text: Luke 22:14-23
Sermon - 9:20 a.m.

"Jesus and The Crowds"

Communion Meditation - 8:30 a.m. & 10:45 a.m.
Text: Matthew 21:1-9

by **Dr. Robert Lee Hill**

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

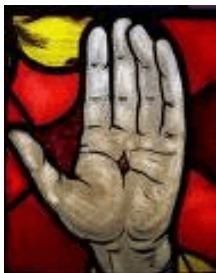


"Hands on The Table"

Sermon - 9:20 a.m. (Sanctuary)

Sermon Text: Luke 22:14-23

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 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." 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. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.



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.

In order to experience the sacred feast of the Lord's Supper with a new sense of vividness this coming Thursday, and even this morning, 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?

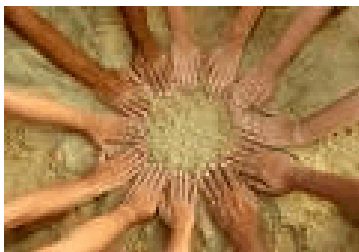
See *Peter's hand*, apparently a strong hand that makes flamboyant gestures, yet it will shrink away in denial three times before the cock crows.

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 overly bold and brazen hands of James and John* who asked Jesus for the great privilege of sitting in prominent places by his side in glory, but who didn't have any idea of how to be disciples on a daily basis.

See *the weary hands of the disciples* when they fail to remain steadfast as Jesus prays, when the time comes for Jesus' moment of testing before public officials, as the crucifixion becomes excruciatingly real. 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." And they did.



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 people have "*overly pious*" hands, so desperately clinging to heavenly religiosity that they can do no earthly good.

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

Some people have "*cynical, all-knowing, condescending*" hands. With a flip of the wrist, some people dismiss the world's grossness, their 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 people have *dominating "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 people have "*indifferent*" hands, overestimating the power of the shadowy places in the world, and underestimating their own God-given capacities, turning away from the world, and often their lives, with a "*Woe-is-me,-what-can-one-person-ever-do?*" shrug of their souls. And when they – when we – do this, we neglect to respond to Christ's daring invitation to grasp the illuminating power of light, 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



remembering is what the Lord's Supper for – our hands are on the table *with His hands*. While our hands can betray and 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 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.

“Jesus and The Crowds”

Communion Meditation

8:30 a.m. (Chapel) and 10:45 a.m. (Sanctuary)

Meditation Text: Matthew 21:1-9 1 When they had come near
Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent
two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and
immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them
and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The
Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately. 4 This took place to
fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

5 "Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought
the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.
8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut
branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that
went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son
of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna
in the highest heaven!"

From the beginning of his three years of
public ministry to the very end of his earthly life,
Jesus was surrounded, accompanied, bothered
and blessed by crowds of people around him.

There was the hungry crowd – as all three of
the synoptic gospels record the feeding of the five
thousand scene – to which he had to respond,
not only to the crowd's hunger but to the
disciples' lack of imagination.

There was the desperate crowd (Matt. 13:2ff)
so eager for a word of encouragement, so much
at-their-wits-end, so desperate, that they
swarmed around Jesus to the point that he had to
get into a boat and preach to them from the sea.

There was the maimed, lame, and halt crowd,
people who swarmed around Jesus for his
healing touch.

There was a lynching crowd at his hometown
in Nazareth (Luke 4:16ff) that liked how he read
the scriptural text from Isaiah's prophecy (Is. 61),
but didn't like how he interpreted the text in his
sermon that followed and nearly came to a point
of an early execution.

Among the most famous of the crowds that
followed crowds was the Palm Sunday Crowd.
This was the lauding and applauding mass of
people who had gathered in Jerusalem for the
high festal occasion of Passover.

Food preparations were paramount.
Memories were stretching back all the way to the
Hebrews experience of bondage in Egypt, like
ribbons of mental energy twisting and twining
and weaving into a cord of recollection. One
can't help but think that this was a time of family
get-togethers, when families gathered from the
far corners of the Galileean hillsides for their
annual reunions.

And you can hear them remembering great
songs of their faith, "Old #118," singing
"Hosana, hosana, blessed is the one who comes
in the name of the Lord."

What Jesus beheld on that first Palm Sunday
is, I believe, pretty much what he'd behold
today.

Crowds can certainly be feisty. But too soon
they turn fickle.

Crowds can be full of adulation, but they can
quickly move toward abandonment.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus heard the raucous
acclaim of the crowds, but by Friday he would
also hear their riotous demands for his head.

All of which is a cautionary tale about the
wiles and ways of crowds:

- #1 Be wary of any group that gives you too
much credit for something that God has had
a hand in and others have contributed to.***
- #2 Don't despair too deeply if the crowds turn
on you and leave you out in the cold. It just
may be that's when God will come to you, as
God did to Jesus, in a especially new way.***
- #3 Be careful of joining too much in raucous
crowds that reduce complex social problems
into simplistic, mechanistic formulas.***
- #4 Remember the crowd that God likes, the
whole human family, and desires a special
relationship with each and everyone of us,
and not simply a select, darling few.
Augustine has it just right, as he describes***

how Jesus Christ loves all of us: “He loves each and every one of us as if there were only one of us to love.”

This morning, we are a crowd that Jesus loves very much. Let us truly avoid ever turning into a mob, or worse, an indifferent herd, by realizing how much God loves us and desires to meet us at this sacred table.

Pastoral Prayer – Rev. Kevin Snow

Today, we give thanks to the Lord, for God is good; God’s steadfast love endures forever. And today a special set of words will be proclaimed from our lips: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” We have been preparing anxiously for this day, and today it is a blessing to find ourselves together in the house of God, among the smiling, beautiful people of God. Today we have gathered to sing our praises in song, and we will be blessed by the special music of others. We pray that these songs will unite us in one voice, as one people, who gather together to proclaim the Good News of Christ’s coming.

As we enter into the holiest of weeks, we pray that you will clear our cluttered minds, and allow us to become truly aware of your presence in our lives. Help us to focus on prayer this week. If we feel the call to pray, push us to set aside some special time each day. Our world remains fractured and broken in many places, but prayer provides one way to bring them back together. Let this Holy Week provide us with a starting point for new beginnings in our lives. Lives that focus more attentively on family, friendships, community, and relationships...lives that focus on the needs of others through service, sacrifice, listening, and love...lives that focus on our relationship with God through prayer, worship, fellowship, and grace. Remind us today, God, that this is our story...our story to share...our story to experience...our story to live out anew year after year.

Offertory Invitation – Rev. Merlissa St. Clair

I’ve never been a fan of crowds. Being...shall we say...“vertically challenged” ...I’ve always

found it difficult and uncomfortable to be smooshed together with lots of other people when all I can see are shoulder blades. I’m reminded of Zacchaeus, who scrambles up a tree when Jesus is passing through Jericho because Zacchaeus is “short in stature” (Luke 19:3), and he cannot see Jesus through the thickness of the crowd.

Imagine for a moment the crowds we recall and recreate on this Palm Sunday. There’s the “very large crowd” the author of Matthew’s gospel describes; “the whole multitude of disciples” depicted in Luke’s gospel; “the great crowd” in John’s account. No matter how you say it, it’s a lot of people!

In every crowd, there are those who are leading and those who are following. In every crowd, some are able to see over the shoulders and heads of everyone else to a new direction. In every crowd, there are those who may not have a clear line of sight, but they make up the energy and vibrancy of the crowd. Even if they can’t see the future clearly, they are there for support, to create the buzz, to propel the mass forward. In every crowd, there are those who maybe aren’t quite sure what’s going on. Perhaps they saw the crowd from a distance and thought it looked like it was moving in a positive direction and so they joined in. They bring questions that help clarify to those who are already there exactly why they have gathered. Each type of person is important – necessary, even – to the crowd.

When we share our gifts – our tithes and offerings – we become part of something greater than ourselves. We become part of a crowd. Perhaps you can see the place God is calling us next as a community of faith. Perhaps you are seeing mainly shoulder blades, but you are part of the critical energy we need be propelled forward. Perhaps you are the one asking the questions that remind us to be attentive to God’s movement in our midst. Whoever you are, your presence and your offering are important because they allow us to continue to be a crowd that makes a difference – a crowd that continues to build the kingdom in the name of the one who causes us to shout “Hosanna!”