

Acts 3:1-10

Healing Hands

3 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

One of the things I always seem to notice about my grandfather is his hands. You see, my grandfather was a farmer his whole life. And by the time I knew him, his hands were tough. They were huge. His fingers were thick and strong. Whenever we hopped out of the car to visit, I always shirked away because he’d always take that big hand and pat me real hard on the head. And when I was younger, I didn’t really think about what made those hands into what they are.

When he was young, he was carrying milk pails and driving tractor. When the war broke out, he took those working hands to Vietnam, using them to build roads through the thick jungle. When he returned home, and after a long day of work back in his own fields, he would wash up those sunburnt and scratched hands and use them to hold a newborn little baby girl, who I call my mother. And now, looking at those rough and thick hands, I can see the story which made them what they are today. Everyone’s hands tell a story.

In our lesson from the book of Acts, there’s a story written on another man’s hands. A lame man’s hands. From the time he was born, his ankles and his legs had no strength in them. While all the other babies his age starting to teeter and tumble on their feet, this little boy could only use those hands. Growing into a young man, those hands probably got rough and cracked, too, having to pull himself around his home. Those two hands had the task of attempting to do the duties of four limbs. Overburdened, the only thing he could do was sit at the temple gate and hold those hands out.

Day after day, he reached those hands out to strangers and friends alike. Hoping that someone might drop a few morsels of bread or a couple of coins into those hands to keep him alive long

enough to do it the next day. Everyone who passed this man on the way to the temple saw those lame man's hands stretched out knew; Those were the hands of a hopeless man.

Everyone's hands tell a story. Yours do too. Written in the wrinkles, in the scars and the scratches, in the bumps of the knuckles. They tell a little bit or a lot about things you have accomplished and done in your life. But there's another sinister story stored in those. Because the lame man had hopeless hands for another reason: those were the hands of a sinner. And even though my grandfather's hands look vastly different from mine, they both have the same problem. Both of our hands contain the record of the wrongs we have committed against God. And so do yours. You might not remember all of the sins that have been accomplished by your own two hands, but they are there. You may perhaps remember vividly the transgressions done with them, and they don't look quite the same anymore.

The lame man in the book of Acts couldn't do a lot with his hands, but there was absolutely nothing he could do to get rid of the sins of those hands. No amount of money received, work done, or pity could release the stains of sin. Our story is the same. It doesn't matter how many times you scrub them with soap; the sin is still there. It doesn't matter how much money that has gone from your hands into someone else's, no amount of food cooked and handed to the poor, no amount of bad guys you have stopped with them, can ever wipe the record of even one sin that was committed with them. Yes, all hands tell the same story. All of our hands are hopeless hands.

But there are another man's hands, which tell a very different story. These are hands that took on flesh in the womb of a virgin. These are hands that grew and got scratched and wrinkled and sweaty, just like ours. But these hands did not sin. These hands gently touched a man's ears and tongue, and he received speech and hearing. These hands broke bread and poured drink to give to his disciples for the forgiveness of sins. These hands were willingly placed on a cross with a nail driven through them, and perfect blood spilling out it was no more. These are the hands of Jesus of Nazareth. These are hands of healing.

When Peter and John saw the lame man, they called not on the name of Jesus Christ for a double healing. And as Peter grabbed the lame man by his hopeless right hand, through the power and healing of Jesus, his ankles and feet became strong, and he jumped to his feet. Those hands so discouraged and depressed now raised to the heavens in praise. Lifted high by those legs made strong by the power of God, they declare the praises of his Savior. But the more critical healing is not physical but of the soul. The whole reason that Jesus walked this earth was not to heal a man's disabled legs but to wash the man's sins away. By the power of Jesus' perfect salvation, those hands that were so sinful, so stained, so marked by sins have been transformed to instruments of holiness. And when he walks into the temple with Peter and John, he had no doubt as to who his faithful Savior is, the one who had healed him.

Jesus doesn't promise that he will always miraculously heal all of our physical ailments. The book of Acts doesn't tell us that we could be healed just as spectacularly as this lame man if we

only had enough faith. He might not ever heal your bad back or your bum knee, and you might not ever recover from that disease that afflicts you right now. But that was never Jesus' goal in the first place. Jesus' goal was to cleanse you from your sins. Jesus' ultimate goal was never to make the blind see the world's colors but to make the spiritually blind see the light of salvation. Jesus' true purpose was never to make the dying live for another five years on earth but to give eternal life to all who call on his name. Jesus came not to heal physical, but spiritual hands.

So even if you still wake up tomorrow with creaking joints, a surgery that still needs to be completed, with anxiety medication that still needs to be taken, you can still raise your hands in praise to Jesus. Because for the sake of his works, his faithfulness, his mercy, your hands are clean. They have been wiped free of the sins that you have forgotten about and the ones which haunt you all too often. We can rejoice like the lame man: walking, and jumping, and praising God. Let the work of our hands be pleasing to the Savior who bought them with the blood from his own.

So Christian friends, as you look at your own unique hands, so different yet so the same. Sinful but redeemed by the life and works of our Savior Jesus, let them be sanctified and joyful witnesses of that spiritual cleansing just like the lame man. Whether they're raised to the heavens or closed in prayer, sweeping floors, or typing on a keyboard, let the things we do with those hands honor and glorify our Savior, Jesus. May we all, in our own unique ways and individual positions, be like the healed man: walking, jumping, and praising God. Amen.