**Good Friday @ Home 18th April 2025**

**Opening prayer**

God our Father, the master maker who wove the world with love, who speaks through creative hands as well as voice, who knit together his son in Mary’s womb, then led him to the cross, we thank you for the costly rescue you planned and brought to pass, through the obedience of your son.  **Amen**

**Readings** John 18:12-13, 19-24, 28; 19:1-6, 14b-18, 28-30

**Reflecting on the Cross: Jesus’ Hands**

**Part 1**

We’ve all seen the cop shows, the moment when they nab the culprit. They read out the legal terms of the arrest, then, arms are twisted behind the suspect’s back and Snap! The cuffs are on and the felon is bundled into a waiting police car.

Why does that procedure happen so regularly? It is because restraining someone’s hands robs them of autonomy – their ability to act for themselves is inhibited. We have a saying don’t we, when we feel we don’t have the liberty to do something: ‘My hands are tied’

When our hands are pinioned, we feel more vulnerable. The homes of older people are often kitted out with grab rails, because we instinctively reach out if we think we’re going to fall. Watch someone trying to walk along a thin line, and they’ll be holding out their hands to balance themselves. Take that ability away, and we feel less secure and trip more easily.

We use our hands to protect ourselves. If an object flies too close to our face, we automatically raise a hand to divert it. We can retaliate against an aggressor, deflecting a punch. Without our hands, we are defenceless.

Why does being reminded of this help us understand the Good Friday story? When I was preparing for this service, some things really leapt out at me from our reading in John’s Gospel.

* Once Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, it says that: They bound him & brought him to Annas. (18v13)
* Subsequently Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas (18v24).

Deprived of the use of his hands, Jesus could not resist, even if he’d wanted to.

The verbs of the passage show how he was treated like an unwieldy parcel:

* The religious authorities took Jesus from Caiaphas to the Roman governor (18 v28)
* Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. (v.1)
* Then after that, Pilate said ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you (v.4)
* But they shouted, ‘Take him away! (v.15)
* So Finally Pilate handed him over (v.16)

Like a taped-up hostage, Jesus is man-handled from court to court, from palace to place of execution.

It’s a human instinct to flinch away from pain, but so Roman prisoners couldn’t escape their beatings, their hands were tied to a post, which is what happened when Pilate had Jesus flogged (19 v.1) Without the use of his hands he could not defend himself.

Following Jesus’ answer to one of Annas’ questions, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. (v.22) Later, the soldiers taunt him by going up to him again and again, and slapping him in the face (v.3). Without his hands as a shield, Jesus was at their mercy.

Of course Jesus had predicted this. In Matthew 16 he said he would: suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law; in ch 17 that ‘The Son of Man was going to be delivered into the hands of men’.

So hands are important for protection, and they can also be used to shove, slap and attack, to restrain and to grip instruments of torture. The crucifixion narrative is a violent story.

But time and again in the gospel accounts of his earlier ministry, Jesus is depicted using his hands in a totally different way.

* At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of illness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed the blind and the stooped, the lame and the possessed, it says in Lk 4:40.
	+ Jesus touched the untouchables, the isolated and vulnerable, and by that very touch, he identifies with them, establishing a connection between them and him.
	+ Then, through his hands, the healing power of God’s Spirit flows, mending and restoring, bringing back life and hope to the desperate.

Through Jesus’ healing hands, the Son of God is fulfilling God’s purpose to restore humankind.

* The image of many old Sunday-school pictures is of Jesus when he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. (Mk 10:16) He also did this with the twelve disciples when he lifted up his hands and blessed them (Lk 24:50)
	+ When we pat a child on the head to praise them, it’s a way of blessing them, just as we do those not yet ready for Communion. With a hand laid on the head, God’s profound love and acceptance of us is communicated, as is our sense of coming under His protection.
* We know that often Jesus went away to pray, and in 1st C Palestine, that didn’t mean adopting the ‘hands together’ pose we were taught as youngsters, but of raising his hands up to heaven.
	+ So whenever Jesus cried out to His Father, His hands were raised in self-offering. And as He prayed for God’s children, bringing them and their needs in His hands before the Creator.
* Remember how Jesus, at the feeding of the 5000, took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them (Jn 6:11)?
	+ Week by week we re-enact Jesus’ commemoration meal, when ‘he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples.’
	+ You see, Jesus does not grasp or clutch on to what’s good, but takes it up - seeing it as God’s provision - in order to release it to His followers.

Think of the famous Leonardo depiction of Jesus’ Last Supper: the Lord holds his arms wide to welcome us to his table, into his fellowship, to share our lives with him.

Jesus’ hands were consistently used for good - to bless, to share, to heal and give.

He reaches out to us still today.

So sit, close your eyes and take some time to imagine you can see Christ extending his hands to touch your life.

* What good does He want to work in you?
* You might like to hold out your hands as a gesture of acceptance …………….

**Part 2**

We’ve all seen the cop shows, and the news, as armed police close in on the wanted person: ‘Surrender! they demand. Come out with your hands up!’ That way they can see that the culprit isn’t holding on to anything that could be used as a weapon.

* When Jesus’ hands were lifted up on the cross, they were empty. Despite the injustice, despite the pain inflicted, He was not holding on to resentment, or anger, disappointment or a desire to ‘get even’. No, ‘Father, forgive them, He says, for they do not know what they are doing.’
* Jesus has also let go of his status. The one who comes from heaven, who is above all, whom the angels would save at a moment’s notice, ‘humbles himself’, a servant of both God’s purposes and humanity. On the cross he holds up his hands, surrendering his life.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus had trusted God. He knew that God always provides when we come to Him with our own, insufficient means. That habit of trust has brought him to the Cross. So now he can let go of everything that is part of his precious human life, because he knows that the Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands as it says in Ch 3 of John’s gospel. (v.35)

Of course it wasn’t easy. On the cross Jesus felt utterly abandoned. But that habit of trust enables him to keep going towards his destiny, to keep surrendering. When the sponge of bitter wine was pushed into his mouth, he did not, could not push it away. He knew he had to drink the cup of suffering.

When Christians try to explain why Jesus had to die, they often talk about the gulf that exists between the righteous holiness of God and the sinful, guilty state of humanity. They might say that Jesus spanned the gap, his cross acting like a bridge enabling imperfect people to meet with a perfect God. Jesus reconciles the two.

Another way of seeing this truth is as a hand-shake:

* When peace has been restored after a dispute, we shake hands, a gesture that enmity no longer exists.
* Before we take communion, we declare peace with each other by shaking hands.
* When we want to stand in solidarity with another, we hold hands.
* Through his self-sacrifice in our place, Jesus takes our hand and links us to God. We are reconciled.

Consider that image of Jesus, arms outstretched, hands wide, nailed to the broad cross-beam. By a dreadful kind of irony, he has been pinned into the very position that characterised his ministry:

* His body open, shared with those around him
* His arms wide as in welcome, inviting us to enter the Kingdom of God
* His hands raised as in prayer, in communion with God as he brings our needs to the Father
* His palms facing towards us, through which flows God’s healing and blessing
* And now, his hands are torn by nails, his broken life an offering for our sins.

Jesus does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

He goes through death that we might have life.

His death pours abundant riches into our lives.

But … we cannot receive all that he wants to give us if our hands are already full.

* Jesus let go of his status, his rights, his power.
	+ Are we grabbing too tightly onto ours, scared of what might happen if we let go?....
* Jesus did not hold onto hurt, disappointment, resentment or a desire to be proved right, however justified.
	+ Is he asking us to lay these feelings down, so that we can accept his gifts?.............
* As we gaze on his crucified body, we see his hands wounded for our sake.
	+ Is Jesus asking us to identify with his suffering, to accept the weight of a cross?
	+ Can we trust him to be with us as we venture into painful or demanding situations?............

So close your eyes and take some time, keeping your attention focused on the crucified Saviour.

* If you are aware that there is unhelpful stuff you’re holding onto, why not hold out your clenched hands towards the cross
* Then, when you feel you can, open them out as a sign that God is helping you to release your life to him.

Let God speak to you now. **Amen**

### Good Friday Reflective Intercessions

Christ has no body but ours, no hands, no feet on earth but ours,

Ours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world,

Ours are the feet with which he walks to do good,

Ours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.

Ours are the hands, ours are the feet,

ours are the eyes, we are his body.

*Please look at your hands.*

As you do so, thank God for all the good things that *your hands* have done over the years – the things you have made, the words you have written, the objects you have cleaned, the games you have played… *SILENCE*

Now thank God for all the *other hands* that have done things for you over the years – parents, husbands or wives, children, grandchildren, friends, neighbours…

*SILENCE*

Now thank God for kindnesses you have received *from strangers*: people you never knew who helped you – maybe someone who gave you a hand in the street, maybe someone who sorted out a problem for you by telephone.

*SILENCE*

Think about people *you know* who need Jesus’ eyes, hands, feet or voice this week – Who will be Jesus’ eyes, hands, feet or voice for them?

*SILENCE*

Think about people *you don’t know* who need Jesus’ eyes, hands, feet or voice this week – the sick, the distressed, the bereaved, the rejected, the unloved, those who do not love themselves. They all need to see and to feel Jesus’ love.

Who will be Jesus’ eyes, hands, feet or voice for them?

*SILENCE*

*Together we pray:*

**Almighty and ever-faithful God
Open our hands and our hearts to love as Jesus loved**

**and to care as Jesus cared.**

**Strengthen us to include in our prayers and in our fellowship**

**those who feel excluded because of whatever it is**

**that has created barriers between people.**

**Help us to accept people as you accept them,**

**as people made in your image and precious to you.** **Amen**