

**THE HAND OF THE LORD...**  
**WHO HEALS THE SICK**  
**Text: Matthew 8:1–17**

Our hands, those **“instruments of instruments,”** as the ancient physician Galen called them, are central to our interaction with the world. They can heal or hurt, build or break, and symbolize power, control, and personal connection. From everyday phrases like **“lend a hand”** to the significance of **“handmade”** in our modern age, we understand the importance of these incredible tools.

The Bible, too, speaks to us through the language of hands. In the Old Testament, the **“hand of the Lord”** appears over two hundred times, signifying God’s creation, power, judgment, and salvation. In the New Testament, this concept takes on a profound literal meaning. Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, possessed real, tangible hands. Through these hands, He performed miracles of healing, feeding, and resurrection, demonstrating His merciful and personal connection to us.

Yet, the Bible also reveals the destructive potential of human hands, culminating in the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ, who was **“delivered into the hands of men.”** However, even in this act, the hand of the Lord was at work, offering salvation through Christ’s sacrifice. His pierced hands, once laid still, now hold us securely, and no one can snatch us from His grasp.

Tonight, and throughout this Lenten season, with the help of the pastors of the Rock Island Circuit, we’ll explore the powerful symbolism and literal actions of hands throughout Scripture. We’ll witness how God uses His hands to create, redeem, and restore, and how He transforms our flawed, self-serving hands into instruments of His grace, service, and praise.

Have you ever felt the pain of being kept at arm’s length? Of being just out of reach of those you love? In biblical times, people afflicted with leprosy knew that feeling intimately. The impact was devastating. As we read in Leviticus, a person with these afflictions was required to wear torn clothing, let their hair hang loose, and cover their face, crying out, **“Unclean, unclean!”** They were considered unclean as long as they were sick and forced to live in isolation, outside the community, among others suffering the same fate. Imagine the loneliness, the fear, the crushing weight of being completely cut off.

In those times, leprosy wasn’t just a physical ailment; it was a complete exile. Those afflicted were cut off from their community, their social circles, and even their religious practices. Imagine the echoing cry, **“Unclean!” “Unclean!”** Even touching a person with leprosy meant you, too, would be considered unclean! The general conclusion was that this disease was a punishment—a sign of some deep sin. This belief, tragically, became an excuse for indifference, a justification for turning away from those who desperately needed compassion.

Let’s be clear: Jesus had the power to heal this man in any way He chose. We see this in our Old Testament Reading of Naaman, a powerful Syrian commander afflicted with leprosy, as he makes his way to Elisha’s house.

Though he was neither bound nor concerned with Mosaic Law as a gentile, leprosy was still a great hindrance to him. Elisha didn't even come out to greet him, but sent out a servant with a simple instruction to wash in the Jordan River. Naaman saw this as an affront to his pride. But when he finally listened to the word given to him, God healed him. You see, it wasn't just about the physical healing. His pride needed to be broken down in order for him to simply believe—to trust in the power of God's word.

Jesus could have responded like Elisha. If He wanted, He only needed to say the word and the leprous man in our Reading would have been healed. We see this very power displayed immediately after this story, when Jesus heals the centurion's servant simply by speaking. And remember the ten lepers in Luke 17? Jesus cleansed them with the same simple command: ***"Go and show yourselves to the priests."*** The Lord is capable of healing in whichever manner He sees fit. He is not bound by our expectations or limitations.

But in our Reading from Matthew this evening, this man first asks if the Lord is willing to heal him. Does Jesus want him to be clean? This question gets right to the heart of the Lord. What does the Lord desire? What does He do? And Jesus answers, not just with words, but with action. He reaches out and touches the man! In a world where leprosy meant isolation, Jesus sets aside all fear of impurity. And He says, ***"I will; be clean."*** Just like the healing of the ten lepers, the power is in the command. The power is in the Word. But here the Lord combines it with the touch. He didn't *need* to touch him, but He *chose* to. Under the Torah, people with leprosy were unclean and needed to keep their distance, but Jesus' action says that He is the source of what makes one clean. The amazing thing is that when Jesus touches the unclean, it does not make Jesus unclean! The unclean becomes clean! This is the power of God's love, a love that reaches into our brokenness and brings healing and wholeness.

Jesus shows us that no darkness, no illness, no brokenness can keep Him away. There is no one He considers untouchable, no one beyond His reach. He doesn't hold us at arm's length; He draws us close. He reaches out to touch them! Christ comes right to the sick, the outcast, and the sinner, to those who are hurting, to those who feel lost and alone. He's not concerned about Himself or His reputation among those who twisted God's law to justify their indifference. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Torah and shows us what it truly means to be clean not just outwardly, but in the depths of our hearts, before God.

All over the Scriptures, we see the compassionate hand of our healing Lord reaching out. He gently takes Peter's mother-in-law by the hand, and the fever instantly breaks (Mark 1:30–31). And then, He continues, healing countless others. As Matthew reminds us, echoing the words of Isaiah, "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases" (Matthew 8:17). This wasn't just about physical healing; it was a demonstration of His deep and abiding love, His willingness to share in our suffering.

In the town of Isenheim, France, there's an ancient monastery that once served as a hospital for those suffering from skin diseases. It was there that the artist Matthias Grünewald was commissioned to create an altarpiece, a powerful work of art designed to offer comfort and hope. When the altarpiece is closed, it reveals an image of Christ, contorted and suffering on the cross.

But Grünewald added a unique detail, especially for the patients at Isenheim. He painted Christ's body covered with skin sores, a visual reminder that, as the scriptures say, **"He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."** Imagine the patients, looking at this image, seeing their own suffering reflected in the body of Christ. They were reminded that their Lord was not distant from their pain, but intimately acquainted with it, sharing in their afflictions.

I've included a link in your bulletin to a video that explores this beautiful altarpiece in detail.<sup>1</sup> I truly encourage you to take the time to watch it at your leisure. It's a powerful reminder of God's compassion and will, I promise you, be time well spent.

The heart of that image, and of all these stories, is this: Jesus doesn't remain distant from our suffering. You're never beyond His reach, never too far from His touch. Jesus, the great Suffering Servant, came to meet us in our brokenness, to bear the weight of our fallen world. The infirmities and diseases we face are a consequence of that fall, a separation from a holy and righteous God caused by our sin. Something we do well to ponder in this holy season of Lent... but not just our sins, only but this:

The Father is still compassionate to us in sending Jesus. Jesus willingly reached out to us in our sinful condition. **"For our sake, He [God] made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God"** (2 Corinthians 5:21). When Jesus healed the leper, He showed us His compassion for all who feel far off, all who feel isolated.

And the ultimate expression of that compassion is the cross. There, Jesus took on the disease of our sin, bearing its weight so that we might be healed. All the healings we see in scripture point to this central truth: Jesus' mission was to conquer sin, to carry it to the cross, and to rise again, victorious, "to never die again" (Romans 6:9). He conquered death, so we might have eternal life. He conquered suffering, so we might have eternal comfort.

We know that our Lord can, and does, still work miracles of healing in this world. While He doesn't promise us freedom from all suffering in this life, He does promise something far greater: eternal healing. This healing begins in the cleansing waters of baptism, where we're joined to Christ and our sins are washed away.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://youtu.be/TuO2PNxGC5s>

So, we hold fast to His promises, trusting the rest to His loving and compassionate care. Just as a sick person needs a doctor, we, as sinners, need a Savior. And in Christ Jesus, we have that Savior. He is *your* Savior. He is the one who took *your* sins, *your* burdens, to the cross. He offers us not just temporary relief, but lasting peace, a peace that transcends this life and extends into eternity.

No matter the depths of your past, no matter how far you feel from grace, remember this: nothing can keep God's outstretched hand from reaching you. Even if the world turns its back, He will not. There is nowhere you can go that He can't find you. As David so beautifully expresses in Psalm 139, ***"Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me"*** (Psalm 139:7–10).

No matter where you've been, how far you've wandered, or how broken you feel—physically, socially, emotionally, or spiritually—your Lord's hand is reaching out to you today. He offers you His words of eternal healing, His embrace of unconditional love. He offers a peace that surpasses all understanding. He offers you himself. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.