

Take My Hand

Psalm 23; Acts 9:36-43

This is the 4th Sunday in Easter, and much as I want to continue the celebration of the Resurrection, it becomes more difficult as we move closer to the Day of Pentecost. Last week our reading in The Acts of the Apostles was perhaps the most familiar story of Acts, the conversion of Paul. Today the scene shifts to Peter, another strong witness to the power of God, loose in the world in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

The writer of The Acts of the Apostles wants to make sure we get the message that the God who created the world and raised Jesus from the dead is still active in the world, bringing healing to the diseased, hope to those in despair, and life where death seems to reign.

Margaret Aymer writes in *Odyssey Networks*,

"So let the church 'gather crying tears that fill a million oceans' (Sweet Honey in the Rock, 2003). For we are people of the resurrection. And we confess, despite all evidence to the contrary, that death will not win."

But that does not easily into our contemporary world view. After all most of us have adjusted our lives to the go-along to get-along ways of the world in which we live. As Charles Taylor says in his book, *A Secular Age*, almost everyone would agree that we live in a secular world – a world where belief in God cannot be taken for granted. We live and breathe and have our being in communities occupied by people we know and respect but do not share our faith claims. In this context it is not easy for us to hold to the belief that death will not win. It's not easy to sustain our faith. It is not easy for us to maintain our stance as Easter people.

To enter into the world described in this Acts passage, we do not need to leave our minds at the door, but it is necessary for us to accept the assumption that God is still working through God's Spirit in the lives of people and in human society to restore this broken world.

We live in a broken world. This broken world NEEDS the hope that comes from the knowledge that God is still working in the world around us. "The good news is about bringing life where there is death, love where there is hate, healing where there is brokenness." People, all people need to hear this message. We all need to receive the hope, peace, and joy that are ours as we hear this Good News.

So why is it that we do not easily share this message of hope? I heard someone say that they did not know anyone who does not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Perhaps your immediate circles of friends are all believers. Maybe every one of your family and close personal friends knows Jesus as Lord of their lives (though I doubt it). But what about the people you meet in the grocery store, the person who delivers your

mail, the parking lot attendant, or the waiter at your favorite restaurant? Have you shared your life-saving, hope-giving faith in Jesus Christ with them?

Everyone needs a savior in this broken world. Daniel B. Clendenin writes in *The Journey with Jesus: Notes to Myself*, "I've found it humbling to ask, 'What 'outcasts' do I sanctimoniously spurn as impure, unclean, dirty, contaminated, and far from God?' The mentally ill, people with multiple marriages, wealthy executives, welfare recipients, conservative politicians, or maybe just anyone different from me?" He suggests that when we view others as impure, unclean, dirty, contaminated, or too far from God, that we do not share the Grace of God.

Tabatha is a disciple, though she is a widow, having no one to support her. In her day, widows had no standing in society and no worth. However, Tabatha "devoted herself to good works and acts of charity." She was a woman who served others. No standing in society, but a beloved disciple, they sent for Peter when she died. Upon his arrival Peter found a dead widow surrounded by mourning widows - who like the women who went to the tomb of Jesus- were preparing her for burial. Peter entered, knelt to pray, then told Tabitha to get up, holding out his hand. Tabitha took his hand and got up.

Tabitha took Peter's hand. That Peter, the agent/disciple of God extended his hand is not amazing. God extends his hand to us through the ups and downs of life, in the brokenness of our world, God's hand is extended, but for whatever reason, we do not take that hand that will lift us from the quagmire that threatens our lives.

Last Monday evening I joined a few of my friends to visit a brother in Christ and his family. We traveled from all directions to their home in a remote area outside Mount Airy. Our purpose: to bring God before him as he went into surgery on Thursday, to pray with him and bless him with a musical serenade that would surround him with the presence and love of Christ.

As we sang I watched my friend who continues to battle a lifelong demon called alcoholism, a life-threatening disease called leukemia, and a continuing battle with heart disease. Though he and his family we obviously moved by the music and love we shared, I observed his resistance to believe that he was not worthy of God's love and care. Though the hand of God was being extended, our bother in Christ was reluctant to take that hand.

According to his spouse, it was after we lifted him in prayer, after we were gone, that he asked, "Why would they come to sing and pray for me?"

Why would we, Jesus' own beloved disciples, go to those who are dead, dying, being threatened by the brokenness of this world? Why would we extend the hand of God?