

Easter 3b, April 18, 2021

Luke 24:36b-48

LFLC

“Look at my hands and my feet”.

Barbara Brown Taylor says that it is a peculiar way
for Jesus to identify himself to his disciples
who are probably wondering if they are having a group hallucination.

And it is peculiar because why doesn't he say:
“Listen to my voice” or “Look at my face”.

Instead, he gives four proofs that he is who they think he is:
Two hands and two feet—hands and feet
that could belong to no one else but him.

Taylor goes on to say that what she likes about hands is that they don't lie.

Oh, we may be able to exercise control over our faces
and our facial expressions so that they look like we want them to—
but our hands give us away every time.

When we are upset, our faces might be smiling
but our fists may be clenched, opening and closing rapidly.
We might not look as nervous or anxious as we are
but our palms are sweaty or red.

And so, while hands and feet may not be the first things
we notice about others, they do tell a lot about us.

One look at hands that are grease-stained and your guess—
a good one—is that she is a mechanic.

You see someone with callouses on the toes and feet
and conclude that this person is probably a ballet dancer.

My hands have stories to tell:

My little finger on my left hand was broken in a high-school football game
and wasn't reset on the sidelines but just taped up.

Today it still sticks out sideways when my hand is relaxed.

My right-hand little finger has a scar on it
from when I reached up and over the fence
and caught a game-saving “almost-home-run”

but, on the way back down, tore open my finger
on a nail poking up from the top of the fence.

The second, third and fourth fingers on my right hand
 are swollen at the knuckles from when I foolishly
 tried to wax the top of my van by climbing up on the roof
 only to slide down the newly-waxed roof. . .
 or, more accurately, fell off using my hand to break my fall.
 Three fingers bent in the middle straight back
 led to a visit to the emergency room
 where they pulled them straight again and taped them up.

Today, “Arthur” . . .Arthritis. . .has found yet another home. . .or homes.

I could tell the same stories about my feet:

Tender super-sensitive heels from the blisters created on the Camino;
 a scar on my little toe where it was almost chopped off
 by our power lawn mower. . .right after my dad
 told me not to cut the lawn in my bare feet
 since I could slip and fall on the sloping and slippery grass.
 “Nah! Not me” I said to myself before it happened.

And “Yup! That’s exactly what happened!” I said to my dad later,
 after he drove me home from the emergency ward.

Now, I suspect that last bit is more information than anybody wants to know
 because feet are somewhat more private than our hands. . .
 which is probably one of the main reasons we wear shoes
 so that none of us knows what other people’s feet look like
 or other people can see the bunions and bent toes
 and ugly toenails on our feet.

Maybe if we wore sandals more often or washed the feet of our dinner guests
 the way our Biblical ancestors did, we would know more
 about who our visitors are and what is hidden
 inside their running shoes or our boots or loafers.

One of my colleagues once said after we both performed
 the “foot-washing” ritual on Maundy Thursday
 that the ritual has both a literal and a metaphorical meaning.
 The literal is obvious: holding someone’s feet,
 washing them gently with our hands and then drying them. . .
 but the metaphor is a way of expressing that the secrets we want
 to keep hidden and private need to be made vulnerable and open to God.

Regardless, for most of us, it is our hands that often identify us.

In fact, I suspect that I could probably even identify some of you
 just by looking at your hands—hands I have had the privilege
 of putting bread into twice a month for the past few years--
 except this last year when only a few were able
 to hold their hands out to receive the bread of life.

Trudy's dad had huge hands: big, strong, well-scrubbed hands,
 but clearly the hands of a master-mechanic and tool and die maker.

He had hands that could run a lathe, a drill-press, a table saw
 and could make or build whatever was needed. . .
 like repurposing an old lawn-mower motor
 to run a home-made merry-go-round in the back yard.

And yet his hands and fingers were so sensitive that,
 despite their wear and tear, they could find exactly
 the right size and thread of a screw, no matter how tiny,
 in a large pail or a large pile on his workbench.

And even though he hadn't "worked" with his hands
 for years before his death, Trud knew it was "My daddy"
 in the coffin just from looking at his hands.

Some of you here today. . . or wherever you are today. . .
 have hands that are your "life" and your "livelihood". . .
 like Val's hands that fly over a keyboard. . .
 while others of you have hands
 that are tender and almost-always sore
 because of fingers bent, gnarled and painful
 or knuckles swollen from the effects of arthritis.

"Look at my hands and my feet" Jesus said.

And when they did, they saw everything he had ever meant to them.
 They saw hands that had taken, blessed, broken,
 and given bread to them. . .and to 5000 others;
 hands that had taken a dead girl by the hand
 so that she rose from her bed and walked;
 hands that had danced through the air when he taught,
 pointing to flowers and birds and fields and bushes;
 hands that had touched, almost caressed, lepers without pausing or holding back.

“Look at my hands and my feet” Jesus said.
 And when they did, they saw feet that had carried him
 hundreds of miles over dusty roads
 to take the good news to those hungry for it;
 feet that had led him into the homes
 of the little, the last, the least, and the lost;
 feet that had been washed with grateful tears,
 dried with the woman’s hair and then anointed with perfume
 as preparation for his burial.

“Look at my hands and my feet” Jesus said.
 And when they did, they saw hands and feet that had been wounded—
 marked with sore, angry-looking bruises and holes
 that hurt them just to look at them. . .
 and saw scar tissue beginning to form over those wounds.

“Look at them!” he said. **“Look at them!”**
 And see what I went through out of love for you and for all. . .
 see them as proof that he had who he said he was,
 proof that he had told the truth about what would happen;
 proof that there was no end to what he would not do
 and no place he would not go for them. . .for us. . .for all. . .
 to prove the depth and breadth of God’s love for them, for us, for all.

Now maybe we wish he had come back from the dead all cleaned up. . .
 but he didn’t. . .and he didn’t because that isn’t the “real” Jesus.
 The real Jesus we pin our hopes and lives on
 appeared to his friends showing his wounds,
 leaving us something by which to recognize him—
 as well as to remind us of what love and suffering will cost us—
 that love and suffering, care and compassion will always leave their mark on us.

And since he didn’t leave his scars and wounds behind
 when he was raised to new life, apparently they are required of all those
 who wish to enter and begin to live the same new life.

In a curious sort of way, we could say that his wounds are invitations to intimacy:
 “Touch me” he says. . .and know that I am “real”—
 that I am “really” here for you and “really” here with you
 and “really” here in you. . .in you and in everyone else. . .in everything else.

In the same way, our being wounded, scarred, broken and hurt
 are signs of our humanity. . .AND OUR DIVINITY. . .
 for we are the dwelling-places, the bodies . . .
 the temples. . .of the Divine and Holy Spirit.

We aren't called or expected to be "superhuman" just "just human"—
 simply and fully human beings who are in a loving relationship
 with the "Ground and Source of All Being"
 and therefore with all beings. . .with all that is.

And so we aren't called or expected to be "ghosts"—
 that is, "unreal 'spiritual' beings"
 but to be "real" incarnated, fleshy human beings
 who, like our Lord and Saviour, bear wounds and scars
 as signs of their new life. . .of our new life. . .of his new life.

Now, if it is true as a friend of mine once said
 that "evangelism" or "sharing the good news"
 is like one beggar telling another beggar where to find food,
 then being part of a worshipping community
 is like wounded people telling other wounded people
 where to find the hospital. . .and where to find healing and wholeness,
 where to find hope and peace and joy in life.

So, if you are feeling depressed, discouraged, disabled,
 defeated, disappointed, drowning or dying;
 if you are feeling afraid or frail, fragile or flawed, a failure or a flop;
 if you are feeling insecure or incompetent,
 incapacitated or inadequate;
 if you are feeling lonely or lost or as low as snake's belly;
 if you are feeling sad or sorrowing, sick or stuck:

Don't despair, but rejoice, because it is precisely our flaws and weaknesses
 and not our achievements and accomplishments
 that confirm we are Easter people. . .resurrection people.

"Look at my hands and my feet' Jesus says,
 reminding us and assuring us that it our weaknesses and brokenness
 that make us like he is. . .that make us useful to God. . .

that enable us, as Glenn said last week of Jesus,
to be “wounded healers” caring for others who are wounded.

We don’t need to be. . .or strive to be. . .or pray to be. . .
strong and brave and victorious all the time.
And we don’t need to be ashamed because we aren’t triumphant
or “on top of it all” all the time and everywhere—
you know, all that “unreal” stuff that tempts us.

On the contrary: It is okay, acceptable, praiseworthy, even Christlike
to be scared, scarred, wondering and wounded by life and by love.

“You are witnesses of these things” he told his disciples. . .and tells us.
“I am entrusting the message of the cross and tomb. . .
the power of forgiveness. . .and the call to repentance—
I am entrusting it all to you.

But not to your pretty eyes or sincere faces
or your well-coiffed or “pandemic” hair style. . .
or your fashionably dressed frame. . .but to your hands and your feet.

Use your feet to go where I send you and do what I tell you.
Use your hands to make of yourself and others
what I have called to be: My hands and feet. . .
my body. . .the Body of Christ. . .in this world.

At the table this morning. . .and every time and everywhere we meet him at it:
He says to each of us, I am literally putting my life in your hands. . .
and asking you to take me with you into the world. . .
to take me. . .to carry me. . .to BE me. . .
and to show me and my love to the people I love. . .
to the world I love. . .to the people and the world I loved to death. . .
and now and always love into life. . .life now and life eternal.

Amen.

SDG