

Wounded for Our Transgressions: His Hands

In Nomine Iesu

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St. Mark 15:22-32

And they brought [Jesus] to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it. And they crucified Him and divided His garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified Him. And the inscription of the charge against Him read, “The King of the Jews.” And with Him they crucified two robbers, one on His right and one on His left. And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!” So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked Him to one another, saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with Him also reviled Him. (ESV)

Lord Jesus Christ, our only Mediator and Advocate, You, by the definite counsel and foreknowledge of God were taken and by the hands of wicked men were crucified and slain, and made intercession for the transgressors, we pray You, grant unto us all the blessed assurance that there is now no condemnation to them which are in You, and that, if any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father in You, the Righteous, whose blood [cleanses us of all wrongdoing], who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 102)

In Christ Jesus, who let His strong hands be pierced, so that the sins of our hands would not be counted against us, dear fellow redeemed:

The Gospels say nothing about Jesus trying to protect or defend Himself when He was beaten and scourged. And when He was taken to Golgotha, there is no record of Him trying to escape and flee. He did not fight back against those who harmed Him. He let the punishment come. “[L]ike a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” (Isa. 53:7).

They threw Jesus down on the cross beam and roughly stretched His arms to each side. Then the point of a large nail was pressed into each hand, and a soldier struck with a hammer again and again until the nails had passed through Jesus’ flesh into the wood. Not only did this cause more blood to flow from Jesus, but it also caused immense pain as the nails displaced and crushed nerves.

Many experiencing this would have cursed those ruthless soldiers. But Jesus did not curse them. He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luk. 23:34). Jesus forgave them and accepted the curse for their sin. They did not seem to notice. While Jesus’ hands were pinned to the cross, their hands were busy. They set about dividing His garments. They cast lots

with dice to see who would get it. First their hands gave out punishment, and now they took from a dying Man.

The people passing by derided Him: *"Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross! Let's see those hands go to work now! Let's see You get Yourself free!"* The Jewish religious leaders joined in the chorus: *"He saved others; He cannot save Himself!"* They intended to mock Him, but what they said was true. He had saved others and was in the process of saving the whole world through His sacrificial death. He could not save Himself *and* save them. He could not come down from the cross *and* fulfill His Father's will.

So Jesus stayed, His fingers curled over the nails in agony. Those beautiful hands – think of all the good they had done! They had perfectly served Mary and Joseph from childhood to adulthood. They had brought healing to the sick and demon-possessed. They had broken bread for crowds of thousands. They had taken the hand of a dead girl and brought her back to life. His hands had folded in prayer. Only hours earlier, His hands had taken bread and wine and given it to His disciples with the words, *"Take, eat; this is My body. Drink of it all of you; this cup is My blood."*

Such noble hands, such gracious hands! How could this be? It was to pay for all the wrongs done by the hands of men. Think how many sins are done or helped along by hands: sins of violence; sins of damage and theft; sins of angry and slanderous writing; sins of harmful computer use; sins of driving where we should not go and doing what we should not do.

Jesus emphasized the seriousness of the sins of our hands when He said, *"[I]f your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire" (Mar. 9:43)*. None of us would have hands if we cut them off the first time we used them to sin. But it would be far better to enter heaven without our hands than to enter hell with them. Our sin is serious and not to be waved off or brushed aside.

We see the seriousness of sin nowhere more vividly than the crucifixion of Jesus. Only the direst circumstances could cause God to send His Son to suffer in this way. The horrible suffering of Jesus was the only way to balance the scales of divine justice. It was the only way to save us from the countless wrongs we had done.

In the ultimate act of love, Jesus opened up His hands to receive those nails. He willingly stretched out His arms because He knew this was the only way to draw all people to Himself (Joh. 12:32). He knew this was the only way to redeem you, to buy you back from the depths of your sin. He let His hands be bound and pierced, so yours would be free and whole. He answered for your sins and suffered your hell, so you would never have to.

By His act of redemption, Jesus redeemed every part of you, including your hands. However they have led you to sin, He forgives it. Whatever damage they have done to others, He is able to heal. He now calls you to use your hands for good. He put His hands in service to you, so your hands could be put in service to Him. Most of the blessings Jesus gives come from the hands of others.

Today we remember how Jesus used the hands of St. Patrick in his mission work to the people of Ireland. Many hands were ready to do him harm. He said, "Daily I expect either a violent death, or a return to slavery, or some other calamity.... I have cast myself into the hands of Almighty God, for he rules everything" (*Saints and Angels All Around*, CPH 1996, p. 111). This is what Jesus did on the cross. With His suffering for sin complete, He said, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!*" (*Luk. 23:46*).

We are safe in the Lord's merciful hands. A beautiful prayer is attributed to St. Patrick which speaks of Jesus' continued work among us to bless us, help us, and heal us:

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger. (*Treasury of Daily Prayer*, CPH 2008, p. 1285)

Thanks be to our Lord and Savior for the work of His hands to bring us forgiveness and life.
Amen.

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