

God's Work. Our Hands.

That is the theme of this Sunday.

And I want to begin with a picture.

You all received a copy of this picture. It is a painting by the German artist and priest **Sieger Köder**. Some of you may know his work. His paintings often tell biblical stories in a way that makes you stop and look for a while. They are not always pictures that you understand immediately. They invite you to stay with them.

So I want to invite you to keep this picture with you during the sermon. Look at it from time to time. You don't have to figure out what the artist intended. Just look.

At first, perhaps, what we notice is the face.

A human face.

We don't see much of the person who belongs to that face. The face itself almost seems to be the whole picture. And there is something very quiet about it. Something vulnerable.

And then we notice the hands.

Two hands are holding the face.

If we look quickly, we might think that the hands are holding the face firmly. But when we stay with the picture a little longer, it begins to feel different.

The hands are not holding this face to control it.

They are holding it so that the face can rest.

The face is being carried by these hands.

And I think most of us know something about that.

There is a difference between hands that are busy doing something and hands that are simply there.

Most of the time, our hands are busy. We use them without even thinking about it. We have spent our whole lives teaching our hands what to do, and now they simply do it. We reach for something, pick it up, open a door, write something down. We hardly notice anymore how much our hands know.

But sometimes our hands are called to do something much simpler.

Sometimes they simply hold.

Maybe you have had one of those moments when someone you love is hurting, and you don't know what to say. You cannot make the situation better. You cannot take away their pain. And so, after a while, you simply put your hand on theirs.

It doesn't solve anything.

But it says something.

It says, *I am here.*

And perhaps that is what makes this picture so powerful.

A face resting in someone's hands.

A person allowing themselves to be held.

And now, with that picture in our minds, we come to today's Gospel.

There is a man who cannot see. Some people bring him to Jesus and ask Jesus to touch him.

And Jesus does something very simple.

He takes the man by the hand.

Jesus leads him away from the village.

And then he touches him.

The man begins to see, but he does not see clearly. People look like trees walking around.

And so Jesus touches him again.

And this time, the man sees clearly.

It is an unusual healing story. Jesus does not do everything in one single moment. There is a first touch, and then another.

And I wonder if that is part of what Mark wants us to notice.

Because sometimes our lives are like that, too.

Sometimes we think we finally understand something, and then we realize that our vision is still blurry. We thought we knew where we were going. We thought we understood what God was doing. We thought we understood another person, or perhaps even ourselves.

And then we discover that we were only seeing part of the picture.

The man in today's Gospel doesn't pretend that he can see clearly when he can't.

He simply tells Jesus the truth: *I can see, but I don't see clearly yet.*

And Jesus stays with him.

Jesus touches him again.

Perhaps that is one of the quiet gifts of this story. We don't have to see everything clearly all at once. We don't have to understand everything before we can trust God. There may be moments when all we can see is the next step.

But Jesus is still there.

And when I look again at the picture by Sieger Köder, I see something of that same tenderness.

A person being held.

A person who does not have to hold themselves up for a moment.

And I think of Jesus taking that man's hand.

Jesus could have healed him from a distance. He could simply have spoken a word.

Instead, Jesus comes close.

He takes his hand.

He touches him.

And perhaps that tells us something about God.

God's love is not distant. It is not simply an idea. In Jesus, God comes close enough to touch us.

God knows what it is to have human hands.

Hands that reach out.

Hands that hold.

Hands that serve.

And eventually, hands stretched out on a cross.

Those hands tell us that God's love is willing to come all the way into the vulnerability of human life.

And then we hear our theme again:

God's Work. Our Hands.

There is something important about the order of those words.

God's work comes first.

Our hands come second.

We are not trying to earn God's love by what we do with our hands. We are not trying to prove that we are good enough, faithful enough, or useful enough.

God has already reached out to us.

God has already held us.

God has already loved us.

And because we have been held by God, our hands can become part of God's work in the world.

That brings us back to the man in the Gospel.

The people who brought him to Jesus could not heal him.

They couldn't give him his sight.

But they could bring him to Jesus.

And perhaps sometimes that is what faith looks like.

We don't always know how to fix what is broken. We don't always know what to say. We may not even know what God is going to do.

But we can still take someone's hand.

We can still walk beside them.

We can still do the small thing that is within our reach.

And sometimes that is enough.

Deuteronomy gives us another beautiful image for this: an open hand.

The command is not to close our hand when our neighbor is in need.

An open hand is a very different thing from a clenched fist. An open hand cannot hold on to everything. But it can receive. It can give. It can reach out. And it can hold another person's hand.

Maybe that is what God asks of us.

Not extraordinary hands.

Not hands that can fix everything.

Just hands that remain open.

Open because we know that we ourselves are held by God.

Open because we are willing to notice the person who is right in front of us.

Open because we trust that God can take something very ordinary and make it part of something we cannot yet see.

And perhaps that is why I wanted you to have this picture today.

Because when you look at it again later, you may see something different than you saw at first.

Maybe you will see the face.

Maybe you will notice the hands.

And maybe you will remember the man in the Gospel, whose sight came slowly, through the hands of Jesus.

And perhaps you will remember your own hands.

Not only what they can do, but what they can mean.

A hand can say, *I am here.*

A hand can say, *You don't have to carry this alone.*

A hand can say, *I cannot heal you, but I will walk with you.*

We cannot do everything.

We cannot heal everything.

We cannot always see clearly.

But we can open our hands.

We can take someone's hand.

We can offer what we have.

And then we can trust God with the rest.

Because God's work comes first.

And sometimes, wonderfully and quietly, **God chooses to do some of that work through our hands.**

God's Work. Our Hands.

Amen.