

***PRECIOUS LORD, TAKE MY HAND***  
**Isaiah 40:21-31; Mark 1:29-39**

Tyler Clarensau, 15, shuffled to the altar in Park Crest Assembly of God in Springfield, Missouri, to ask for healing. The surgery he'd had to correct his mal-formed knee joints had left him with swelling and terrible pain. Forty Pentecostal teenagers formed a circle around Tyler and began to pray. Gradually, the whole congregation joined in. Some 45 minutes later, silence fell. Then one of the church volunteers announced that God had healed Tyler. Tyler shakily stood up; then did deep knee bends – something he hadn't accomplished in years. Today Tyler can walk, he can even run. "I'd heard about people getting healed," he said. "I thought it was pretty cool. But I didn't know for sure about such healing until it happened to me"

Have you ever experienced the sort of miraculous healing experienced by Simon's mother-in-law and the others in today's Gospel? What were you more deeply aware of afterwards? What 'exquisite awareness' was then yours?

Healing the sick and similarly possessed was a central part of Jesus' earthly ministry. His gift of physical and spiritual healing restored human beings to full participation in their communities. Healing and deliverance from pain and illness is a hallmark of the great prophetic dream called the Reign of God, where no one goes hungry, the ill and grieving are healed, and those in various kinds of prisons are set free for abundant life. Over and over again in the gospels we hear that Jesus "went about healing many who were sick or possessed by demons." It is a foundational image of the work we share as his followers.

When Jesus went to Simon's house, he had just come from healing a man possessed by demons. Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a fever, and Jesus walked over, took her by the hand, and "raised her up." That same word for raised or lifted up is used on Easter morn – "he is not here, he is risen" – but it is also used of Jesus being lifted up on the cross. Simon Peter's mother-in-law is raised up from her illness, and what does she do? She begins to minister, to serve. She is the first active witness to what a resurrected life in Jesus looks like. At baptism, we too are raised into a new life of service or ministry to others and acknowledge that ministry is a matter of lifting up our crosses daily. Jesus frees us not only from things that seek to oppress us, but also for a life of purpose, meaning, and good works.

We may not know her name, but the mother of Simon's wife is a model for our own servant ministry. Touched and healed by Jesus, she becomes minister of healing herself. She gets up from her bed and presumably begins to feed people, as any good Jewish housewife of the day would do for her son-in-law and his honored guests.

The very next encounter that Jesus has in Mark's gospel is also about touching and healing someone – this time a leper. The leper is told to keep quiet about his healing, but he can't do it – he has to tell the world. The upshot is that Jesus can't even enter a town without being besieged. The world is desperate for healing.

Like the street outside Simon's mother-in-law's home, the streets out there are also filled with the sick and possessed, each one eager to be made whole.

The touch of a hand can heal, restore life, and exorcise our demons as well. Michelangelo used that powerful image of life-giving touch when he pictured creation as God reaching out a hand to Adam, offering life. We often say that Christians are the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. How do our hands serve as instruments of healing, and help to raise others to new life?

Simon's mother-in-law gets up and serves a meal. Food and feasting and the heavenly banquet are central images of a healed creation. The Good Samaritan ensures that the robbery victim he lifts up and takes to an inn is provided with food and drink for healing. The resurrected Jesus shares breakfast on the beach with his grieving and dispirited disciples. You and I have abundant opportunities to feed the hungry – through the contributions we make as we support CCM, as we support local farmers, and development that helps people around the globe to grow nutritious and affordable food.

The touch of healing is obviously about caring for those with physical illness. Our hands may be put to healing work in literally tending the sick, infirm, or housebound, but, equally important, ensuring that all members of the community have access to medical care, such as that provided by Davidson Medical Ministries. Additionally, our hands may serve in the voting booth, as well as in the sickroom.

Hands can also heal psychic illness. My friend's brother-in-law, who served in Vietnam, had the demon called "no hope." When he didn't feel the needed hand of healing in this life, he ended his life. We pray that the good shepherd hands that led him home will bind up his wounds. Yet we see others who do find the needed touch of healing, whether in a person who will sit and listen to the pain behind the war stories or the searching hands and eyes that will take a fallen comrade to shelter or hospital.

Hands may provide hope in surprising ways. I visited a congregation in Florida recently which has for many years been host to an Ethiopian Orthodox community, nearly all of them refugees. That community worshiped with us on a Sunday morning, and shared a joyful telling of the story of Israel going down into Egypt and being led out by the hand of God. That was what we were told before the story began; and as the chanting started, we may not have understood the words, but we did hear and see the liberation of that journey to freedom. During the lengthy singing a young woman beat the rhythm of the tale on a large and powerful drum, three feet across and five feet long. She alternated between loud booming beats on the large end and staccato conversation on the small end. Her hands held the whole of the singing group together. Those who sat in the congregation accompanied her with complex clapping rhythms and hula-like movements of their hands. Together a varied and disparate group of hundreds formed one whole, focused on the power of God to lead us into the worship and to wholeness and holiness.

Where have you met the healing hand of God? Where has that hand, gloved in human flesh, reached out to lift you up? Maybe that hand has fed you or soothed your troubled and

fevered brow. Perhaps that hand has even shaken you to greater wakefulness, to notice the lonely soul or the suffering mob in the street outside. Jesus' healing touch was grounded in open vulnerability. He received the yearning masses, healing as many as he could. He taught the crowds about the present reality of God's reign, breaking in all around them, and he offered hope. He silenced the demons who would cry out that there is no hope. He formed disciples by letting them try the work themselves, even though they frequently failed. He held himself open to whatever and whomever the day presented, even the terror of execution at the hands of an occupying government. His service was one of constant lifting up, in the face of forces that would tear down.

Will you let yourself be taken by the hand and lifted up? Where and how will you join hands, reach out, and lift up others to healing? For, indeed, as Simon and his companions said to Jesus when they found him at prayer, "everyone is searching for" that physician of hope.

*Precious Lord, take my hand  
Lead me on, let me stand  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn  
Through the storm, through the night  
Lead me on to the light  
Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home.*

-- Thomas A. Dorsey, 1932

**Let us pray.**

O God, your loving hand has made us in your own image, given us all we possess, and redeemed us through Jesus your Son. Reach out your hand again and heal us, so we may respond in kind, offering your hope and healing to all who are broken in body or spirit, that together we may be your whole and healed and holy Body on this earth. This we pray in the name of your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.