

**April 15, 2018 – Third Sunday in Easter**  
**“Hands and Feet Recognition”**  
**Rev. Dr. Scott Landis**  
**Luke 24:36b-48**

A few months ago, my husband, Randy, got one of those new-fangled phones that allows one to do almost anything by holding it up to your face in order to unlock it. Recognizing only the owner – the phone uses the relatively new technology known as “facial recognition.” When he told me he got it, I immediately got all up in his face wondering why in the world one would need a new phone with facial recognition particularly when the old phone that used the outdated method of plunking in a series of numbers to unlock it seemed just fine.

It was then that he reminded me that my “older phone” – it’s not a flip-phone I assure you – not only will unlock when I keystroke in a series of numbers that only I know – but also will unlock simply by holding my thumb on the home button. It uses the much “older” feature of thumbprint or hand recognition. Hummmm – he got me. We’ve come a long way – haven’t we? Or have we?

If you read the gospel stories recorded in Luke following the resurrection of Jesus in these post-Easter days, you would notice that Jesus appeared three times after his crucifixion. First, to the women at the tomb. Second, on the road to Emmaus as he walked along with a few of the disciples who were fleeing Jerusalem fearful of what might happen to them. It wasn’t until he broke bread with them in their home that “their eyes were opened, and they recognized him as he vanished from their sight.” And now a third time – to those gathered in fear just days after the crucifixion wondering what they should do next. On each instance he is not initially recognized.

The story read today begins, “Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” Naturally, they were “startled and terrified” – the writer explains – as they thought they were seeing a ghost.

It’s a wonderful story proving it would all turn out just as Jesus said, but what intrigues me, and the reason for my opening illustration as I began my meditation today – he doesn’t say to them take a look at my face – look deeply into my eyes, or listen to my voice to prove it is really him. No. Jesus says, “Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I, myself.”

It was at that point that they saw his wounds. In his hands and feet they recognized him and realized that this was not a ghost – but really Jesus, risen just as he

promised them he would. In other words, this new technology – handprint recognition – has a very old and extremely credible precedent. [Pause]

In her beautiful sermon on this passage, the Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us of the oft overlooked importance of the identifying features of our hands – and also our feet, but even she admits feet are much more private - most of us keep them covered most of the time.

I agree and I've got a funny story about feet to concur with Barbara. You may remember it was just a few weeks ago that I had hip surgery. One of the consequences is I cannot (for the time being) bend more than 90 degrees making it nearly impossible to cut my toenails. It's the small things in life. I happened to mention this to one of our church leaders who surprised me with a gift certificate for a pedicure spa treatment in a local establishment. Somewhat reluctant to go – yet needing my toenails cut, I went this past Friday. Now, I have very funny feet – very crooked toes and weird toenails. So I was terribly self-conscious when I walked into the salon. To make matters worse, there had to have been fifty WOMEN in the place and not one man. Suffice it to say, I was not in my element. I nearly bolted. But once I put my feet in that warm water, and put the massage chair in action, and had the lotion applied, foot massaged – well, I just may go back. Even so, I agree with Barbara – feet are a private matter. I'm glad I did not know the gal who worked on mine – nor did I see anyone there I knew. But let's get back to the story.

Even, Barbara Brown Taylor critiques facial recognition. She goes on to say, we can usually make our faces out to be better than what they really are with concealers, and make-up, anti-aging creams, and moisturizers. And not a few have been known to undergo plastic surgery to defy the ravages of gravity. But our hands - they reveal who we really are.

So, take a moment, and look at your hands. Go ahead when's the last time you really did so? Feel them – be reminded that they are an important part of you. Our hands tell the real story – the story of our lives.

Some of us wear rings on them which may indicate marriage or a gift bestowed – or even that piece you just had to get when you were on your last trip. Some are big and strong well-calloused from a life of hard work. Maybe yours are dry with unkempt nails and, God-forbid, migrating cuticles. Or perhaps yours are manicured and well-polished with artificial features to enhance their beauty.

Mine are skinny, wrinkly, and veiny and seem to look much older than they should at my “young age.” Years in the sun have taken their toll. Often cold, you will frequently see me sitting on them to warm them or I'll rub them together vigorously

just before we “pass the peace.” My pinky still bears the scar of the time I sliced it on a motor blade back when I was working in the pump house of the pool where I served as a life-guard. That same pinky took a beating as it was later broken – the victim of a skiing accident. While I don’t look at them very often, I do believe I would recognize them in a line-up of other hands. They are mine – I cannot deny them. And they have stories to tell.

My work gives me ample opportunity to notice the hands of many others as well. I typically reach for them when offering a prayer. I can feel the story of the other in that moment as they may be sweating or cold, trembling or warm to the touch. I sometimes feel a sense of strength in the big rugged hands, and other times hope in those reaching for reassurance.

Rev. Taylor describes how she recognizes many in her congregation from repeatedly putting a piece of brown bread in their hands as they come forward to receive Holy Communion. “I know some of them by heart,” she says. “I don’t know which ones I like better: the hands with some wear and tear on them, who have some clue what this meal cost, or the little children’s hands, who reach out and take it entirely for granted. *This is God’s table. I am God’s child. Give me my bread.*”<sup>1</sup> (Pause)

Back east where I am from, full body internments are still the norm in burial customs. The funeral is often preceded by what’s known as a visitation or viewing. Family and friends of the deceased will line up to pass by the open casket and offer their respects before they come through the receiving line to shake your hand, offer a hug, and express their condolences.

I particularly remember the viewing of my former wife’s grandfather. A farmer his entire 90 years of life, Grandpop Hendricks was used to hard work: milking cows twice each day, hauling hay, fixing tractors. While he was small in stature, his hands were huge and ones I noticed in life and even more so in death. His hands stood out to me – hands I remember that blessed me and prayed for me in joy and in deep sorrow. [Pause]

Jesus said, “Look at my hands and my feet.” He did so, I believe, to gain more than his own recognition. While that was important to verify his bodily resurrection to that small band of disciples that were fearfully huddled behind locked doors, I believe this revelation was in service to something much more important. His appearance was more than simply to prove that what he said had now become reality – which the disciples could now see for themselves. His outstretched hands

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Barbara Brown, *Home by Another Way*, Cowley Publications, Boston, MA, 1999, p. 120.

and wounded feet were both an invitation and a challenge, “You are witnesses to these things.” [Pause]

When they looked at them, they saw the wounds still fresh from the brutal death that took away their hopes that he was their Messiah. Now they had to reinterpret all of that as they listened to him, “Look at my hands and my feet.” In so doing they had to come to terms with a Savior that would not forgo even death to demonstrate his love for them – for all.

“Look,” he said to them now that the danger had passed. “You can look at them now.” He wanted them to know he had gone THROUGH the danger and not around it, so he told them to look – not at his face, not into his eyes – but at his hands and his feet, which told the truth – the real story – about what had happened to him.

Some of us may wish he had come back all cleaned up, but he did not. Rather, he left us something to recognize him by – his hands and his feet, just like ours, or almost like ours. You know what is said about him. What do ours say about us? Where have they been? Whom have they touched? How have they served? What have they proclaimed?<sup>2</sup>

“You are witnesses to these things.” That was the final challenge Jesus offered to them – and to us.

When the world looks around for the risen Christ, when they want to know what it means when we proclaim, “He is risen indeed.” They look at us. Not at our pretty made up faces – as important as they may be. No, they look beyond the sincerity of our eyes and the veracity of our words to our hands and our feet – what we have done with them and where we have gone with them.<sup>3</sup>

We are witnesses to THESE things. Indeed, we are – the body of Christ.

Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor, Home, p.123.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, Home, p. 123.