

“Hands On”

“Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe’” John 20:27.

For the past couple of months, Madeline and I have been introducing Everett to solid foods. As some of you know from personal experience, some days are better than others and some foods certainly are better than others too! To say the least, it’s been a learning experience for all of us. Going through this process for the first time, I marvel at how new everything is for Everett. I know that many times I take for granted the familiarity and comfortability I have with solid foods. And now introducing these new foods to Everett, I’m quickly reminded that this isn’t an overnight process. It takes time to grow comfortable. When all you know is a liquid diet, adding solids that have different textures and tastes is a big adjustment!

Throughout these past couple of months, one thing that has stood out to me as Everett grows into solid food is how important it is for Everett to be “hands on” with his food. In fact, this is something Everett’s doctor has reinforced for Madeline and me when we visit. While being “hands on” has led to many humorous moments and very messy faces, touching these new foods, is a big part of the process for Everett to become more familiar and comfortable with solid foods. Getting his hands on his food helps lessen the hesitation, doubt and even at times fear he may have with some of the new foods. Over the past couple of months, it’s been fascinating to see his comfort level grow!

This comfort from being “hands on,” that’s what I want you to keep in mind for the rest of our time together. The familiarity and comfort that is built from being “hands on” is something that is very noticeable in our reading from John. For one disciple in particular, we witness how being “hands on” removes hesitation, doubt and fear.

From the first verse of our Gospel reading, we find out that it is the evening of the day of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus has already appeared to some of the women who had been following Jesus throughout His ministry, but He hadn’t appeared to His chosen twelve disciples, now eleven with Judas’ death, just yet. That changes this particular evening. Into a locked room, in the midst of fear, Jesus appears to His disciples. He shares with them peace and forgiveness, won for them by His crucifixion wounds, and then He commissions them to share this peace and forgiveness with others. However, we learn that one disciple, Thomas, isn’t there.

So, after Jesus leaves and Thomas returns, these ten disciples share their experience with Thomas. And the simple details of this exchange, leave us wondering a lot about the emotions that these men were feeling. Were the disciples excited and overjoyed to share the news? Were they in shock still processing what they had seen? Was Thomas angry at being left out? Was he hurt or fearful that he missed out? All we know for sure is that the ten disciples who saw Jesus tell Thomas, **“We have seen the Lord”** to which Thomas skeptically responds, **“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”** (John 20:25)

For about a week, these eleven men have to live with this tension. Ten have seen the resurrected Jesus, one hasn’t. Ten are believing, one won’t believe based on the others’ testimony alone. Yet after a week, despite this tension, the disciples find themselves together, all eleven this time, and Jesus appears. Right away, Jesus invites Thomas to be “hands on,” to put his fingers where the nails left their mark and to place his hand where the spear wounded His side. Being “hands on,” helps remove Thomas’ hesitancy, doubt and fear and instead brings comfort and familiarity evidenced by his statement, **“My Lord and my God!”** (John 20:28)

Friends, one of the critical things I must impress on you from this account of Thomas and Jesus, is this reality that our God is the God who is “hands on.” Like with Thomas, Jesus continues to place Himself into sinners’ hands, into our hands, even in this present moment. It’s Jesus’ words that fill our service from our liturgy, to our songs and prayers, to especially our readings. We literally hold Jesus’ words in our hands, whether in the bulletin, in the hymnal or in the Bibles here or at home.

God is also “hands on” through Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In Baptism, Jesus places His work, His death and resurrection into simple water by His powerful word. By Jesus’ word and promise, we know that this baptismal water washes the sinners’ bodies clean delivering Jesus’ forgiveness won for them. In the Lord’s Supper, Jesus places His Body and Blood, in, with and under the bread and wine so that communicants might receive in their hands and mouths forgiveness, life and salvation won for them by His Body and Blood.

God is even “hands on” as He sends His Church out to forgive in His name in daily life. Through pastors and all Christians, through husbands and wives, through brothers and sisters, through teachers and students, through employees and employers, through friends and neighbors, God is “hands on,” placing His forgiveness into this world of sinners.

Yes, our God is “hands on” for our benefit but this is a reality that Satan constantly attacks. All the ways that our God reveals that He is “hands on,” the devil, world and our own sinful flesh want us to be hesitant about receiving what He provides, to doubt the certainty of His presence and to even fear the seemingly unreasonableness of this “hands on” reality. Instead, we are tempted and even encouraged, to resent, manipulate and control the ways that God has made Himself “hands on” for our benefit.

We know this sinful struggle and challenge all too well. Reading Jesus’ words from a screen or piece of paper at church or at home becomes tedious and boring and those words are slowly drowned out by more entertaining things. Our belief of Jesus’ presence in the sacraments grows doubtful and unreasonable so we replace these gifts with experiences that we feel are more meaningful. The lack of forgiveness we see in so called Christians makes us question whether this church thing is really all worth it anymore. Then all of the sudden, the places where God makes Himself “hands on” are all the places we’re choosing to be “hands off.”

Yet even when we pull back, our God doesn’t! Even though we become inconsistent, our God remains consistent. He consistently continues to place Himself into the hands of sinners, no more to die, but to personally deliver the forgiveness of sins His death won for all people, for you and for me. Just like Madeline and I have to be consistent in giving solid foods to Everett even when he fusses and has different ideas, so also our God continues to regularly come to us, even when we’re resistant, with the solid foundation of forgiveness and our salvation anchored in Him and His work alone.

And as we continue to receive these gifts, our familiarity and comfort with our “hands on” God continues to grow. Think of the disciples, this time in their lives as they grow in certainty of Jesus and His work for them didn’t happen overnight! They were taught for three years and had multiple encounters with Jesus after the resurrection to strengthen their faith and conviction. It’s the same thing for us! The Holy Spirit is at work calling us by the Gospel delivered through Word and Sacrament. He is opening our hearts and eyes to see and receive our God who has made Himself “hands on.” And He’s not going to stop His work until Jesus returns.

Yes, our God is “hands on.” From creation, to saving us, to guarding and keeping us safe until He returns, our God is “hands on.” He formed us. He died to save us and still bears those marks of forgiveness won for our sake. He lives to see us safely to His side. Yes, Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! He rose to be “hands on” in your life today, tomorrow and until He returns. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan