

The Rev. Skip Bushee
April 30, 2006 – 8:00 service

3 Easter, Year B – *How Do We Recognize the Risen Christ?*
Micah 4:1-5; Acts 4:5-12; Luke 24:36b-48; Psalm 98

I read a story about a young woman whose parents died when she was a teenager. Being the oldest, she assumed the mother's role of caring for her younger siblings. After several years of hard labor in which she sacrificed her own happiness in order to provide love and nurturing for her brothers and sisters, she was taken ill. At the hospital the doctors discovered she was dying. Hearing of her plight, a well-meaning minister decided to visit her and help prepare her for eternity. However, as often happens, he was so intent on having her recite the proper words that he failed to truly share the love of Jesus. He found himself becoming somewhat frustrated at what he saw as her lack of cooperation and finally he asked: "But what will you have to show the Lord when you stand before his judgment seat?" The young woman quietly replied, "I will show him my hands."

"I will show him my hands." By this statement, she proves who she is, and that is a suffering servant. We see the Jesus within her by looking at her hands.

In this morning's gospel, we have a similar story about the hands of Christ as the suffering servant. The risen Christ encounters the disciples who have locked themselves in a room in fear of the authorities and, following the ignominious death of their master, have all but lost their faith. Strange reports have come to them from individuals who claim to have seen the risen Christ but they find it hard to believe such a fantastic story. Sure Jesus had told them that he would be killed and rise again on the third day but how likely was that? Anyway, the guy was always talking in parables and who really understood the true meaning of what he was talking about? Besides that, the reports of this miraculous resurrection came first from a couple of women, and if men are a bunch of chauvinists today, you can imagine how mistrustful they were of women in the first century. And then two of their own showed up claiming to have encountered the messiah

while on the way to Emmaus. Well, you know, stranger things have happened to otherwise sane people at the end of a long dry journey.

Now an apparition appears in their midst claiming to be the risen Lord. But how could this really be Jesus in the flesh. The doors and windows were locked so that they felt that either they must have been hallucinating or this must be a ghost.

So how did they come to realize that it really was Jesus? Simple. He said to them, “Look at my hands.”

“Look at my hands.” Just like the dying young woman who sacrificed everything for those she loved, we know Jesus by his hands. In his hands we see the marks of the nails that held him to the cross, the cross that he endured as the greatest act of love ever seen.

We can tell so much by looking at a person’s hands. Not just the calluses of the laborer, the long delicate fingers of the pianist or the distorted and bent fingers of one suffering arthritis, but also we can see so much of what is inside a person or what they may be feeling by their hands.

My wife’s family is Italian and you will hear them ask the question, “Why is soccer the national sport of Italy?” The answer, “Because it is played entirely with the feet and thus leaves the hands free for talking. (Sorry Angelo.)

The truth is that regardless of national origin, we all use our hands to express ourselves. We can even communicate very well using just our hands without saying a word. Hands are a window into our feelings, a window into our very soul. As with the dying young woman and the resurrected Christ, we can see the Jesus in someone by looking at their hands.

Sometimes we need to look for the Jesus in people by looking at their hands, especially if the person is one of society’s outcasts, someone whose face we would rather not see.

These are people who do not vote so the politicians do not see them. Perhaps they are people who are dirty and homeless so society finds them repugnant. Perhaps they are among the many who suffer from brain disease so their behavior makes us avoid them. Or perhaps they are people in prison so we fear them. We need to look at their hands.

There are 12 million undocumented workers in this country that many in our congress would like to see go away. We can see them throughout our city as they stand on street corners hoping that someone will hire them as day laborers. All they want is a chance to make a living and care for their families. If we look at their hands, we see the calluses of hard labor, Jesus is in those calluses.

There are six million people in this country with serious mental illness. We used to care for the most serious of these cases in state mental hospitals. There were some abuses but in general, the system worked well. Then we decided that the cost was too great and we closed the mental hospitals, justifying our actions by saying that the mentally ill should not be locked up against their will.

So what has happened to these people? Well, about 15 percent of the seriously mentally ill, or about 900,000 of these souls, are homeless, living in filth, eating from dumpsters, incapable of caring for themselves. Another quarter-million are in prisons because their disease has caused them to commit violent acts. At least these people are fed and housed although they seldom get proper treatment for their illness. If we look at their hands, we see the pain and anguish of a tortured soul. Tortured though it may be, Jesus is in that soul and in those hands.

Lastly, there are 2.3 million people in prison in this country. Each year, about 650,000 are released back into society and each year two-thirds of these will return to prison. Our prisons are not the correctional institutions they claim to be; they are places to warehouse people we have deemed to be a threat to us, people we would rather not see. If we look at their hands, we see bitterness and anger at a society that has rejected them, that has in

their minds given them no option but to pursue a life of crime. And yes, we see Jesus in those hands.

As Christians, we are subject to our Baptismal Covenant, which charges us to “...strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” We are called to demand that our government redirect its priorities toward the nameless outcasts in our society. We need to pass laws that show respect for the undocumented workers in this country and provide a path to full citizenship. We need to change our laws so that the mentally ill can receive humane treatment and be given a path to wellness and productivity in our society, not locked up in prisons or locked out on the streets. And we need to find better ways to prepare those in prison that are on the path toward release to be successful and productive members of society without having to resort to crime in order to survive.

Jesus said, “You will know me by my hands.” What he is saying to us is look at the hands of those about us, especially those we would rather not see. If we do, we will see Jesus in those hands and realize that we are all God’s children, even the undocumented, the mentally ill and those in prison. Jesus loves all of these as much as he loves each and every one of us and he calls us to do likewise.