

*“Hands and Feet –
His, Yours and Mine”*

Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 3:12-19; I John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

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From the Pulpit

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A sermon delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Easter 3, April 15, 2018, dedicated to the 100 children who sang at First Church yesterday, to their parents, siblings, and directors and always to the glory of God!

“Hands and Feet – His, Yours and Mine”

Acts 3:12-19; I John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

I loved the sermon title when I wrote it down some time back for Tax Day 2018 (actually it is April 17 if you are freaking out). But, I have a new title – *“Hands and Feet – His, Yours and Mine.”*

On this day when some of us are trying to finish our taxes and all of us are about to learn more about safety from a fire drill (fifteen years from the last one), I am going to keep this simple. This sermon is about hands and feet. The hands and feet of Jesus, you and me. It is about what he did with his and what you and I do with ours.

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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In Luke 24:36b-48, our Risen Savior appears to his disciples - again. They believe they are seeing a ghost, but he shows them flesh and bones. He offers them his hands and feet - four proofs that he is who he says he is. He wants them to see his wounds. He doesn't want them to look in his eyes or listen to his voice. He wants them to look and see his hands and his feet.

“Look at my hands and feet,” he says.

These hands... These were the hands that had reached for his mother Mary in the manger of Bethlehem and then reached for the stars where God and the angels shined holy light. These were the hands that had broken bread and shared cooked fish by the seaside. These were the hands that had pressed mud against a blind man's eyes and lifted Lazarus out of the tomb. These were the hands that had danced in the air when he taught and reached out to touch lepers without pausing or holding back. These were the hands pulled them

when they needed to walk forward and pushed them when they were troubled to step out and face their fears. These were the hands of compassion, love and justice.

And these feet... these feet been his strong foundation throughout his life. They had been his leverage when working at a carpenter's bench, his guide when he descended down a muddy river bank into the Jordan River waters of baptism. These feet had carried him to prayer in the desert, into wrestling matches with The Devil, into the fray of thousands of miles of places from which most people walked away. These feet moved toward people starving for food and good news. These feet had taken him on walks of solitude and into crowds of need; into the homes of criminals and corrupt bureaucrats whom he treated like long lost friends. These were the feet of courage, forward progress, mission purpose and justice action.

All four of his hands and feet were wounded now.

The hands, the feet - all four of them broken and bruised and torn from the crucifying cross where he had hung just a few days before. And the Risen Christ wanted his disciples to look, because they had never looked before. He wanted them to see - that in spite of the brokenness of his hands and feet - the danger was past and God had transformed the cruel death into a victory for life. The Risen Christ had gone through the

danger and not around it. His hands and his feet that bore the truth. His broken, bruised and torn hands and feet were now the hope of the future.

It is important that we see the hands and feet of Jesus as well.

We need to step up and take a good long look. Love requires us to look. Love requires us to use our hands and feet after we look. Too many of us want to live in our heads. We can create all sorts of worlds in our heads – some of them real and others far from real. But, it is our outer-most appendages that make a difference in this world. With our hands and feet, we can move from our heads into acts of compassion and action. We can also move others with our hands and feet.

Recently, it is the hands and feet of young men and women across our nation that have led us from despair to hope on the streets and in the legislative halls of Congress and our state houses – led by the young men and women of Parkland, Florida and Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School. Challenging us to step up and step out for gun safety, these inspirational Americans have called us all OUT. They have called us OUT of lethargy and self-pity. They have called us out of sad static states into dynamic motion.

They are not the first young men and women in America to do this. This nation has been led by young men and young

men for generations. It is the young who have saved us and redeemed us time and time again.

For the last six years, since the murder of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, Black Lives Matter have called America to accountability for the taking of young black lives on the streets of our cities – including Cleveland, Dayton, Cincinnati and Columbus. At the Rally to End Racism held on the National Mall on the 50th Anniversary of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's Assassination on April 4th, one speaker after another called those of us to be the hands and feet of hope and change in our nation to ACT to End Racism. The A.C.T. translates to Awaken, Confess and Transform in ending racism in America. But, I would contend that beyond awakening and confessing with our heads and hearts, we have to awaken and confess with our hands and feet, too.

In this Easter Season, we are called to action with our hands and feet right here in Columbus as well. BREAD (Building Responsibility Equality And Dignity) is our justice organization working for change in Franklin County. I have had the honor this winter of co-chairing the Research Committee attempting to address the needs of youth and families in our community. We have uncovered some disturbing facts. Quite honestly, some of our meetings have been depressing as we receive information of the challenges

faced by our community's youth and families. They are also disturbing reflections of the great needs in our community.

One thing we learned from the research is comes from Dr. Richard Florida at the University of Toronto. In a March 9, 2015 article in [The Columbus Dispatch](#), it was revealed that after Austin, TX, Columbus, Ohio is the second most racially segregated city in the US. Austin has taken this to heart and is intentionally changing their situation. So, soon, unless we do something, we will become the most racially segregated city in America. This is horrible.

We have also discovered that over 54,000 families in Franklin County are currently spending 50% or more of their income on housing. We have a HUGE gap between people's ability to pay and affordable housing in our community. We have also discovered that the greatest correlation between mental illness, violence, hunger, failure in school, and lack of jobs and job readiness for young people in our community is directly related to housing. A young man or young woman is more likely to "make it" if they have a place to call home than if they don't. Dr. Glenn Thomas, of Nationwide Children's Hospital Behavioral Health Center said that the one factor which most affects mental health in a young child or teen is a place to call home.

We are also aware that the best “dream” plan in our county calls for affordable housing to address 27,000 people in the next 10 years... with 3,000 being established in the next 3 years. My Research Team and BREAD says, that is too little help for a crisis affecting 54,000 families NOW. We are calling for the Mayor, the City Council, and The Franklin County Commissioners to address this huge and growing housing crisis. This will be a heavy lift. That is why I am imploring you (did I say BEGGING you?) to join me on Monday Night May 7th to call for housing for all our citizens – beginning with our youth and their families. We will begin at 7:00pm sharp. We will be done by 8:30pm. PLEASE sign-up in the office or see me or another BREAD rep. Or come! We have tickets in the main office. We have to show up with our feet and raise our hands in action for justice on behalf of our youth and their families.

Yesterday, at the amazing concert of five choirs at First Church, over 80 young voices joined together to raise the roof in our sanctuary. They were incredible! Our small and mighty Jubilate Choir led the way. Thanks to Dr. Sandy Mathias and Kevin Jones for a great day of singing. They were all sensational!

The offering was taken for the Homeless Families Foundation for whom our own Anthony Brown works. “The Homeless

Families Foundation believes that it is unacceptable for any child in Columbus to be homeless. Not one child. Not one night.”

The Homeless Families Foundation has put their hands and feet into educating and nurturing children while empowering families to achieve stable housing and self-sufficiency. We need to stand with Anthony and HFF. BREAD is doing just that. But, you and I are BREAD. There is no one else who will be the hands and feet for this movement of change.

The Risen Christ said, *“look at my hands and feet...”* So, what will be said of my hands and my feet? What will be said of your hands and feet? Will you and I be able to say they our hands and feet have been our mission partners? Will our feet guide us forward to stand, to walk, to march in faith? Will our hands be faithful in serving and in giving and making justice in our world?

We stand at crossroads in these times.

We can keep standing there and wondering what to do. Or we can follow the children who are leading us forward – hands down. Feet down.

In 1931, Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi spoke these words, *“If we are to teach real peace in this world and we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children.”*

The children are leading us. How are we following?

What are we waiting for? Another sign from God? We have had it. We have had more than enough signs from God. Scripture tells us that the children will lead them. The Children of Ferguson and Parkland are leading us. The children of Homeless Families Foundation and BREAD are leading us. The children of First Church are leading us. Let’s pick up our feet and move. Let’s open our hands and be transformers.

Before the Risen Christ ascends in the Book of Acts, he says “. . .You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Our eyes or our voices will not be his witnesses in our culture of need. Rather, it is our hands and our feet which will lead and inspire.

May God guide our feet and our hands to be and to lead the body of Christ, now and forevermore. Amen.

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