



Rev. Dr. Sally L. Harbold
Homily, February 17, 2013



Deut 26:1-11, Luke 4:1-13

At first glance, in this lesson from Deuteronomy, there is a powerful image of the land that God has designated for the people of God...

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At first glance in the lesson from Deuteronomy there is the powerful image of the land that God has designated for the people of God... "this land that you will inherit and possess and settle in..."

This land is that which God has prepared for you... a place! And, the passage describes, that when the people enter this land, in thanksgiving they will say before God that these are my people and you are my God.

And I will give unto God the first fruits of my labor for I am grateful for all that God has given me... "The Lord brought us out - with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm...."
And I return to God... my first fruits.

Immediately with these images I notice the difference between you and I and these people of God in this story.... primarily because we have generally not known, in our lives, this precise longing for a home land, or found ourselves living for this arrival to a place that God has prepared for us... well, not a geographic place anyway.

Our longing to be with and to know God is not focused on the promised land of Israel, but is more of a spiritual longing. yet the story tells us, reminds us even today, that this God we seek, this God we worship, our God is giving us an inheritance to 'posses.' The story tells us that God ...reaches out a mighty hand... an outstretched arm toward the children of God.

God reaches your way, God reaches my way, God reaches out to all people.

What ground of spiritual being has God prepared for you and me?

What is the ground of spiritual being that God has prepared for each of us?

Today, on the first Sunday of Lent, this day is marked as The Sunday for the Blessing of our Hands. As I ponder God's reaching out to us and my own longing for God I see clearly how central my hands might be in my relationship with... and in my sense of belonging to God. My hands can be central to my finding God. My hands can be central to my calling out for God.

Our Promised Land... our ground of being is not The Promised Land, or I would propose, not heaven either, which we do not necessarily understand or expect to know here on earth. Rather, our true ground of being is here... in this flesh and blood that we inhabit. These thoughts and skills, these actions, our emotions, the care that comes from and also into our lives - this is where we find and know God's presence, God's bounty, God's work in our lives and in our communities.

The Spirit of God inhabits this flesh and all of life. Our true homeland is the place where we find God's Spirit. And Jesus said "the kingdom of heaven is within you".

And so I find myself considering again the truth that our hands and feet are the hands and feet of God in our world. Our actions can invite God's presence into our own lives and into the lives of others. Once each year for several years we have invited you to come back to the baptismal font, for a blessing upon your hands to remind all of us that a holy and life giving manifestation of God with us is, indeed, the work of our hands, whatever that work might be.

Yesterday I was in Charlottesville, VA visiting with Jennifer Durant, whom many of you know, and who suffers with ALS, Lou Gehrig's Disease. And I wondered about this invitation of considering our hands to be an extension of God's love and God's purpose in our world... when she is losing the use of her hands.

So I asked her how she would feel if she were sitting in a church and she heard someone say that God is manifest in the work of our hands. And there followed a lovely conversation between us about how the hands, no matter whether they are effective in task or not, the hands are a metaphor... a metaphor for how we connect with God through our spiritual lives ... in prayer and supplication, within our hearts, and in the ways in which the feelings in our hearts are expressed through our being with one another.. in handshakes and hugs, in thought, in service, in creativity.

The Gospel reading today reminds us that these ways that God is manifest through the work of our hands does not mean that everything will flow smoothly, easily or quickly. The work of our hands - of our lives is often long-suffering. The effectiveness of the works of our hands is fruitful because it comes from our relationship with God.

Jesus was tempted to forget this. In the desert, he was bidden to turn to quick fixes that missed the actual needs of the people he would serve...that would miss the broken hearts, the hungry spirits and the deep soul needs of every person - needs which bread could not and would not satisfy. He was tempted to think of or look for the outcomes, for the solutions, more than how He might serve each human person that would stand before him.

The reason the tempter gave for these pre-emptive miracles was so that people would know Jesus was God's son. Right? Like...prove it to me! But without Jesus' own connectedness God and then to each person he encountered, those pre-emptive actions, these minor miracles, if you will, would have had little meaning.

Living within ourselves and meeting one another right where we and they are, this is the ministry of Jesus. This is the compassionate use of our hands, of our being in the world.

The invitation today to each one of us is to connect first with our own ground of being, our spiritual homeland that is within our hearts and minds. Our invitation as we enter this Season of Lent is to seek and serve God both through the metaphor of our hands and the use of our hands.

The connection with ourselves can be the pathway that also connects us to God. Our connection with God will help us to know God's gifts in our life, God's blessings of skill and provision and mercy, that are unique to each of us.

Let us enter the Season of Lent open to knowing what we have been given by God, And Seeking what God has promised we will inherit.

May we inhabit our own ground of being - which is our connection with God.
May we find God...in personal ways, through our thoughts and actions, through our words and care, and through the long suffering work of our hands and our lives, whatever we do.

The Care and Share Leadership Teams invites you to walk to the font after communion and before the post communion prayer to receive a blessing upon your hands.

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