

Body of Christ: Arms

Isaiah 59:1-8, Matthew 19:13-15

Center Church, Hartford

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The Body of Christ has arms. Your arms. Take a minute now and look at your arms and hands; see how they move, the amazing complexity of your fingers. Did you know the human hand has more bones in it than any other part of the body? We have five senses with which we interact with our world: taste, hearing, sight, smell and touch: our hands are the only place outside our heads that delivers one of those senses.

Close your eyes a minute. Think about how you have used your arms and hands so far today. (Pause)

Our arms and hands are the way we connect with the world around us, with things like food and fabric and keyboards and phones and other human beings. Our arms and hands take us out of ourselves and link us to the rest of creation, including the rest of the human creation.

Babies who are not touched do not thrive and can die for lack of human touch. Many years ago, during the early days of the AIDS epidemic, back when it was still a bit unclear how it was transmitted, AIDS patients were not touched with ungloved hands. I visited a parishioner who was dying of AIDS-related cancer, and she had only one request when I asked her what I could do for her. She asked me to touch her without gloves on. Of course, I did.

Jesus healed by touching people. In the story we heard today, he gathered children around him and blessed them by touching them, appropriately. He touched people like lepers and foreigners that others avoided touching. The story he told to define what it means to be a neighbor involved someone touching a man who had been beaten bloody when others would not. In a time when

touching has come to mean something bad, we need to reclaim the power of good touch.

Because, without a question, human beings also use arms and hands to hurt, which is what the prophet Isaiah said that God lamented. Arms and hands can punch, shoot, sexually abuse, steal, and, perhaps worst of all, remain folded and unused when they are most needed. This is why the apostle Paul made a point of saying more than once that our bodies are temples, holy places. As the poet Mary Oliver says, God is unseen, but holiness is visible all around us. Our arms and hands are holy and are only to be used for acts of love and care and in service to our gifts from God.

I'd like to do something a little different for a moment. Think for a minute about a time that someone used their arms and hands to help you in some way, someone who lived out the holiness in them through their arms and hands.

Now turn to someone near you and each of you share your story for a couple of minutes.

At our Annual Meeting last week, the "Big Idea" for moving forward into our future that captured the imagination of the majority of people there was entitled "Put Center Church in the Center of Hartford." Back when this building was built, and even farther back when Hooker and company first came to Hartford, that was easy; Center Church **was** the Center of Hartford, by location but also by influence. They built it and people came. But the world is different now in many ways. People don't come to us here in the same way, we are not the Center by default. Now, as always, actually, we are called to be arms and hands, reaching out from our Center here. The description of this idea put together at the Retreat made clear that being the Center doesn't mean sitting here waiting for people to come to us. It reads like this: "Establish a system/network for collaboration and communication with neighbors (businesses, churches, institutions, politicians, etc.). Be the resource and share the

resources we have for ministries that serve all our neighbors. Get to know our neighbors/identify who they are."

This big idea means we become the arms and hands of the body of Christ. We reach out from our sacred Center, this place which is the solar plexus of our body, where we come to unleash the energy of praise and to be empowered to be the arms and hands of the body of Christ alone and with each other **for the others around us**. We are called to be like the people who helped you with their hands and arms, and together with each other and with those others with whom we might collaborate, we can be powers for good in greater Hartford.

The poet Denise Levertov put it this way: "We have only begun to know the power that is in us if we would join our solitudes in the communion of struggle." Now close your eyes and imagine how we might join our arms and hands together with each other and others to be a force for good; what might we be and do? (Pause)

Get some notes on your bulletin or on your phone about what you imagined; there is an easel with paper at the back of the meetinghouse for you to write down what came to you as you leave today.

"We have only begun to know the power that is in us if we would join our solitudes in the communion of struggle." We have to start somewhere. Let's reach out our arms and see where they take us. Amen.