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GOD'S WORK, OUR HANDS
Peace, Seattle
September 8, 2013
Galatians 5:13-14, Luke 4:14-21

GOD'S WORK – OUR HANDS

You can tell a lot about a person from looking at their hands. Our hands say so much about us and our story because they are at the forefront of how we engage in the world.

Our dreams & visions, our convictions & commitments, and our will to act, may begin here (in the head), but it's here (the hands) where the rubber meets the road.

Whether an inner conviction is transmitted into grasping a tool, soothing a child, fixing a meal, lifting a weight, or writing a check, it's the ACT that finally counts.

There was a time when you could discern a person's vocation through a careful examination of their hands. How many calluses, and where; how clean or dirty the fingernails were; the location and number of scars received from encounters with hammers and nails, barbed wire, bricks, engine parts, saws and knives.

As it kid, I would have no trouble picking my mother's hands out from a lineup: they were perpetually cracked and sore from all the cooking, baking, and cleaning she performed—and most especially from the countless cloth diapers she rinsed, soaked in bleach, washed, hung out to dry, and put on the bottoms of her 8 children, in an endless cycle for about 16 years running.

Mom always wore white gloves to church when we were growing up…Partly because it was the custom of the day. But partly, too, I suspect, because it covered up the cracks, sores, and bandages that always attended her hands.

At men's breakfast on Wednesday Claude passed around some old photos, including one of his father in law suspended halfway down a steep cable that was fastened to some kind of derrick or fishing rig. There he was, balanced nonchalantly on this cable and all that held him there was one bare hand.

Claude told us when he shook hands with his father in law, his own hand disappeared. They were that massive. You remember hands like that.

In the gospel of Mark,[1] Jesus' vocation is identified by the Greek word "TEKTON."
"Carpenter" is the commonly accepted translation, but "tekton" could also be translated "builder" or even "stone mason." The point is, Jesus grew up learning a trade that involved working with his hands.

So when, in our gospel, Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, part of what's going on, it seems to me, is that he's saying there are particular, specific, concrete actions and signs that attend God's reign.
The people in the congregation that day may have heard the same text read aloud many times through the years, never thinking that the text might apply to them or how.

But all that changed when Jesus rolled up the scroll, sat down, and said: TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE HAS BEEN FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING. The theoretical had become real. The rubber was hitting the road.

[1] Mark 6:3

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Well, today is <u>GOD'S WORK – OUR HANDS</u> Sunday here at Peace and across the country, and the premise is simple: We are called to be about God's work in the world, and that call translates into public work, visible work, tangible work, in which we use our hands.

Of course, using our hands to care for our community, for our neighbors, is more than a once a year event. Many of you are involved in hands-on ministries every week that impact the neighborhoods and community in which you live, from preparing or delivering meals to serving on community boards; from tutoring in schools to visiting the homebound; from working at food banks to volunteering at senior centers or befriending youth, working with immigrant families, or in healthcare fields.

There is an astonishing array of vocations to which God has called the good people of Peace. God's work is being transmitted through your hands, your feet, your voices, your talents.

As Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson reminded us at our synod assembly last May,
> "The state of the ELCA is lived out wherever <u>you were</u> last Wednesday
> and wherever <u>you will be</u> next Wednesday."

During its first 25 years the ELCA has built a reputation across the country of putting people power and resources on the ground when disaster strikes. It's what we do; it's who we are.
> God has work to do in the world and utilizing our hands is one way God gets it done.

"The gospel of Jesus," Brother Martin said, "compels us always to turn our vision ever outward toward the welfare of our neighbor."

St. Paul employs the language of paradox when he says:
> "You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

There is no end to the way this loving your neighbor can happen; the only limit is our own creativity.

So today, a crew of golden-shirted servants from Peace will clean out a pocket park at the Morgan junction; and weed out some garden beds at West Seattle Elementary.

And if anyone stops to ask us who we are, we'll simply say, WE'RE PEOPLE FROM PEACE LUTHERAN. And we'll let our actions speak for themselves.

(pointing up) God's work…(congregation responds) OUR HANDS!

Amen.