

One of the most peculiar things about John's resurrection story is the way Jesus identifies himself to his friends. "Look at my hands and my feet," he says to his frightened, doubtful disciples.

Shaking in their sandals, they wonder if they're having a group hallucination when Jesus offers them his hands and feet to show that he is who he says he is. It's the wounds he wants them to see, but isn't that a peculiar way to identify himself? Why not say, "Listen to my voice," or, "Look at my face"? Could you identify someone by hands and feet alone?

It's been twenty years since, last, I saw her. But, were I to see and touch Elsie's hands today, I believe I would know they were hers. She was in her 80's when I knew her, confined to a wheelchair and living in a care home. Yet, her hands were large and strong, and her handshake was firm. She had lived her whole life on a small family farm. Twice a day, year after year, decade after decade, from childhood to old age her chores had included milking their cows by hand. Even when I knew her late in life, you could see and feel that strength in Elsie's hands.

George Battelle was a childhood and a life-long friend of my father. George was a "little person," a man who stood around three feet tall. A man of quick wit and kindness, he made his living as a jeweler in Winnipeg, well-known in that city for his excellent, very delicate and fine work. You could see how George, with those hands of his, had truly found his calling.

Another man I could identify by seeing and holding his hand, is Murray. We met 33 years ago, shaking hands after church. I felt his thumb, index- and middle-fingers, but his ring and little finger were missing from his right hand. He had lost them in a grain auger accident, years before. Murray had the heart of a farmer, and, he had those wounds and scars from a moment's inattention to his work. A strong and tender hand, on a strong and tender man.

Could you identify someone by hands – or feet – alone?

What I like about hands is that they do not lie. They can't. While we can usually exercise some control over our faces, making them look the way we want, our hands give us away every time: nervous hands, clenched hands, damp hands, soiled hands. Our hands can reveal our mood; identify our occupation; even expose elements of our health.

“Look at my hands and my feet,” Jesus said. When they did look, his friends saw everything that he'd ever been to them. They saw the hands that had broken bread and blessed broiled fish, holding it out to them again and again. They saw the hands that had pressed wet mud against a blindman's eyes, and, had taken a dead girl by her small hand so that she rose and walked again. They saw the hands that had made gestures while he had taught them and told them his stories. They saw the same hands that reached-out to touch a leper, not flinching or hesitating.

And they saw his feet, the same feet that carried him over many dusty roads, taking his good news to all those needing and longing for it. To the rich, the politically corrupt and compromised, while they ate together. To the poor and despised, ridiculed and rejected, whom he called his brothers and sisters. It was his feet that carried him to such as these. The same feet that a woman had knelt and wept over and washed with her tears. The same feet at which Mary had sat, together with the other disciples, to listen to his teachings even as her sister Martha was calling her to come and help in the kitchen.

They were wounded now, his hands and feet. Risen from death to new life, this is what Jesus showed to his frightened disciples – the hands that had joined him to other people, the feet that had joined him to the earth. They had holes in them now, sore, angry-looking bruises that must have hurt his friends to look at. There were many reasons for this, of course; including that, earlier, when they had figured-out what was coming to those beloved hands and feet, his disciples had fled. They went into hiding, because they did not want to look upon the suffering that they knew would be inflicted upon his hands and feet.

“Look,” he said to them afterwards, when the danger was past. “You can look at them now.” He wanted them to know that he had gone through the danger and not around it. So he told them to look, not at his face, not into his eyes, but at his hands and feet which told the truth of

what had happened to him. His wounded hands and feet spoke the truth of who he was, and of who he is.

Following the tragic accident in our province that involved the Humboldt Broncos hockey team, I remember seeing a photograph that one of the injured players' dads had taken in the hospital. You know the picture. It quickly become "iconic" and was seen by millions of people in Canada and around the world. This photo shows that Dad's son, and two of his teammates, lying on hospital gurneys. Each is injured, cut and bandaged. Each has needles and intravenous lines in their hands and arms. The boy in the middle faces one way, his buddies on each side of him face the other way. And what is it they are doing, this wounded trinity? They are holding hands. By the hand in his own hand, each knows that they are not alone. By the hand in his own hand, each knows that there is someone who understands. By the hand in his own hand, each draws strength from and gives strength to the other. Through these wounded hands that they have held – they may know the hands of One who, also, holds us now and always.

Some of us, perhaps, wish that Jesus had come back at Easter all cleaned up, unblemished. He did not. But what he left us with was something to recognize him by – his hands and feet, just like ours, or almost like ours. You know what his hands and feet said about him. What do ours say about us? Where have our hands and feet been?

Whom have they touched? How have they served? What have they taught? What “good news” have they proclaimed? Our hands and feet.

“You are witnesses of these things,” Jesus told his friends before he left them; entrusting the world to their care, to our care.

To take another’s hand in ours, wounded as our own body or spirit may be, lets them know that they are not alone. And, too, that we are not alone.

It may not always seem like it, but still today the world looks to us (to you and I and to the church) to bear our witness to the risen wounded Christ among us. The world looks, not so much to our faces and our sincere eyes, but to our hands and feet and what we have done with them; where and to whom we have gone with them. Wounded as we are – individually, and as the church in our day – still, we are “the body of Christ” (his hands and feet) in and for the world.

I know some of you are thinking that your own “best days,” of reaching-out your hand and walking with others on their journeys of life and faith, are behind you. Maybe your hands are arthritic, or your feet have bunions, I don’t know. But if this is what you think, I want you to listen to this witness of a woman whose hands still praise God and still touch the wounds of God’s people and God’s world. The woman’s name is Anna Paulson, of whom her friend Kathleen O’Keefe Reid writes:

Strong the hands of Anna Paulson. Hands that milked cows and midwived calves, baked bread and bathed babies. Graceful, too, hands

that played Sunday preludes and painted sunsets. All this and more were the hands of Anna Paulson until arthritis took its toll, making her hands cramp up like the claws of some wild bird of prey.

Holding on to the aluminium walker, moving it by fractions across the carpet from bed to chair seemed all that was left to her hands to do. But the hands of Anna Paulson were not dead yet. At age 92, any day of the week, you could find them breaking chains, snapping rope, building bridges, turning the key in the prison door.

On every day of the week, the hands of Anna Paulson prayed.

On Sunday she prayed for her church, that the doors would stay open.

On Monday she prayed for the earth, for peace in the Middle East, and for the migrant temporary farm workers in B.C.

On Tuesday she prayed for her town, for the schools, and for the factory that just laid off another hundred people.

On Wednesday she prayed for the sick, especially the boy next door who came home drunk again last night.

On Thursday she prayed for the hungry, especially the children.

On Friday she prayed for the homeless, especially the children.

On Saturday she prayed for the victims of violence and abuse, especially the children.

No pair of hands could have been more powerful than those of Anna Paulson. Because she prayed the hands of Anna Paulson belonged to God, and the might of God's right arm belonged to her.

Strong the hands of Anna Paulson.

Today, my friends, I want to say that strong are your hands too. For when we pray, our hands belong to God; and, God's power, love and grace belong to us. When we place our hand in Jesus' hand, and follow where his feet lead, we become witnesses to the wounded Risen Christ, alive, in and for the world today. Yes; strong, through this wounded Risen Christ, are we!