Luke 24:50-51 Jesus' hands are raised in blessing. Ascension Day, May 13, 2010
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Grace and peace from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.
God's Word to keep us thinking of Jesus' blessing is from Luke 24:50-51
These are Your words, fill us with joy through the news of Jesus, our ascended Lord. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Friends, in Christ,

This evening we are celebrating Jesus' ascension to heaven. Jesus physically appeared during the 40 days after His resurrection. He often appeared and then vanished from sight. But at His last appearance with His disciples Jesus visibly went into the sky. As He ascended, He lifted His hands to bless His followers (v.50) until He was hidden from their sight. Although people don't see Jesus today, they can still receive His help.

Jesus' hands are raised in blessing.

First, our hands are so different than His! At an early age, children get their little hands get into trouble. They hit someone who took a toy or throw food when angry. Later in life they push others down or they hold them away rather than shake their hand in friendship. We are all too quick to point our fingers to accuse people of wrong, but slow to forgive them. Throughout life, our hands have had opportunities to help and to give, but instead we have used them to hurt and to take. When we are challenged by difficulties in life, it is so easy for us for "*our hands to hang limp,"* as the Bible states or to worry instead of trusting in God. Think of Jacob. When his father Isaac was ready to bless his brother Esau, who had hair on the back of his hands, Jacob put goat skins on his hands to deceive his father. Like Jacob, we too think that we must take matters into our own hands rather than call on God to help us.

Our hands can get us into serious trouble. God said, *"When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! (Isaiah 1:15-16)* But, we do not keep our hands innocent. We daily put our salvation at risk by failing to respond in faith to God's blessings and forgiveness.

Jesus warned about our danger when He spoke to His disciples, *"If your hand … causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed… than to have two hands… and be thrown into eternal fire." (Matthew 18:8)* Did Jesus really want us to hurt ourselves? No. He used an extreme picture to say that we cannot let our sins control us or stand in the way of our salvation. Judas heard Jesus' message that day. He had been using his hands to steal from the disciples' money bag. And later he would hand Jesus over to the enemies, giving his soul to the devil.
What kind of sins in our lives are trying to block us from benefiting from all that Jesus has done for us? The Bible warns those who fall away from Christ, *"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31)*

Second, how different Jesus' hands were! His hands were strong, but gentle in that He could hold a fragile Bible scroll when reading in the synagogue. His hands had a remarkable touch, always doing good things with them. When Jesus extended His hand to the sick they were made well. When He put His hands on the little children, they were blessed. When Jesus wanted to prove that He could forgive sins, he gave strength to a paralyzed man so he could walk.

Jesus knew that we needed much more than healing. We needed a completely new life. Jesus would give His life to accomplish this. He said that He would be given into the hands of His enemies. He allowed His enemies to slap Him with their hands and hit Him with their fists. With their hands, they drove nails through His hands on a cross and hung Him as one cursed by God. As a substitute got sinners, Jesus put Himself into the hands of an angry God.

He did it to pay for our sins in full.

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples many times, showing them the nail-scarred hands. He met with the disciples one last time on the Mt. of Olives. Our verses state, *"While He blessed them, He was parted from them and carried up into heaven." (v.50-51)* It was the duty of the Old Testament priest to lift his hands and pronounce a blessing on the people before they would leave an assembly. Jesus was our great high priest by first winning our forgiveness on the cross and second by rising to bring justification to the people of the world.

Jesus is now in heaven at God's right hand. That does not mean that He is far away. For, just as God is present everywhere, so is Jesus. His human nature has now received honor and glory for the victory He won over all evil. All authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth. He is Lord of all just as God the Father is Lord of all. And He has a kingdom that will not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:14) We have been made a part of that kingdom through faith in Christ. He rules over this world so that no matter what happens in life, no matter how much the devil brings against us, Jesus, our Lord, will work for our good. His final goal is to have us, bodies and souls, in heaven with Him. Jesus promised, *"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go …, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:2-3)* What a blessing we have as believing children of God!

Before, I said how our hands are shaking from sin and how we lack the confidence in Jesus that we should have. But, Jesus is fighting for us to keep us as His own. The Bible states, *"The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." (Psalms 110:1)* These words show that God accepted Jesus' work. By His sacrifice He defeated the devil and won the victory for us! But, we can only benefit by trusting in Him. That is why Jesus remains wholly committed to us now. The Bible states, *"Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." (Romans 8:34)* The sins we commit could destroy our faith. But, Christ is praying for us. He has sent the Holy Spirit to keep our faith alive. Jesus promised, *"My sheep listen to my voice; … and they follow me. I give them eternal life…, no one can snatch them out of My hand." (John 10:27-28)*

The Bible described the New Testament Church as Jerusalem and that Christ protects it. *"On that day they will say to Jerusalem, 'Do not fear…; do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you….'" (Zephaniah 3:16-17)* Jesus will provide for our needs. His Word promised, *"You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing…. The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth." (Psalms 145:15-18)* Our *"times are in His hands!"* (Psalm 31:15)

On the first ascension day, the disciples showed their confidence that Jesus remained their Savior by *"worshiping Him." (v.52)* They praised Him, knowing that He could hear their words in heaven. They went back to Jerusalem and *"were continually in the temple praising and blessing God." (v.53)* In worship we can say with the Psalmist, *"Sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory." (Psalms 98:1)* After today's sermon each of us will be folding our hands in prayer and we can be certain that Christ will hear us. He promised, *"Where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20)* Let's continue to use our hands to hold God's Word as we read it and to call on Him in prayer, asking that God's will be done. And then, remember that the eternal victory does not depend on us, but victory and blessing is in the hands of our ascended Lord. Amen.