

One in God's Hand

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Ezekiel 37: 16-19, 22-24 – Today's English Version

The LORD spoke to me again: "Mortal man," he said, "take a wooden stick and write on it the words, 'The kingdom of Judah.' Then take another stick and write on it the words, 'The kingdom of Israel.' Then hold the two sticks end to end in your hand so that they look like one stick. When your people ask you to tell them what this means, tell them that I, the Sovereign LORD, am going to take the stick representing Israel and put it with the one that represents Judah. Out of the two I will make one stick and hold it in my hand.

I will unite them into one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. They will have one king to rule over them, and they will no longer be divided into two nations or split into two kingdoms. They will not defile themselves with disgusting idols any more or corrupt themselves with sin. I will free them from all the ways in which they sin and betray me. I will purify them; they will be my people, and I will be their God. A king like my servant David will be their king. They will all be united under one ruler and will obey my laws faithfully.

John 17: 1-2 and 9-11

After Jesus finished saying this, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your Son, so that the Son may give glory to you. For you gave him authority over all people, so that he might give eternal life to all those you gave him, gave them the message that you gave me, and they received it; they know that it is true that I came from you, and they believe that you sent me. "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those you gave me, for they belong to you. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine; and my glory is shown through them. And now I am coming to you; I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world. Holy Father! Keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one just as you and I are one."

All of us know very well this picture. The "Praying Hand", by Albrecht Dürer.

These hands have a story...

Back in the fifteenth century, in a tiny village near Nuremberg/Germany, lived a family with eighteen children. Eighteen! In order merely to keep food on the table for so many of them, the father, a goldsmith by profession, worked almost eighteen hours a day.

Despite their seemingly hopeless condition, two of the children had a dream. They both wanted to pursue their talent for art, but they knew well that their father would never be financially able to send either of them to Nuremberg to study at the Academy.

After many long discussions at night in their crowded bed, the two boys finally worked out a pact. They would toss a coin. The loser would go down into the nearby mines and, with his

earnings, support his brother while he attended the academy. Then, when that brother who won the toss completed his studies, in four years, he would support the other brother at the academy, either with sales of his artwork or, if necessary, also by laboring in the mines.

They tossed a coin on a Sunday morning after church. Albrecht Dürer won the toss and went off to Nuremberg.

Albert went down into the dangerous mines and, for the next four years, financed his brother, whose work at the academy was almost an immediate sensation. Albrecht's etchings, his woodcuts, and his oils were far better than those of most of his professors, and by the time he graduated, he was beginning to earn considerable fees for his commissioned works.

When the young artist returned to his village, the Dürer family held a festive dinner on their lawn to celebrate Albrecht's triumphant homecoming. After a long and memorable meal, punctuated with music and laughter, Albrecht rose from his honored position at the head of the table to drink a toast to his beloved brother for the years of sacrifice that had enabled Albrecht to fulfill his ambition. His closing words were, "And now, Albert, blessed brother of mine, now it is your turn. Now you can go to Nuremberg to pursue your dream, and I will take care of you."

All heads turned in eager expectation to the far end of the table where Albert sat, tears streaming down his pale face, shaking his lowered head from side to side while he sobbed and repeated, over and over, "No ...no ...no ...no."

Finally, Albert rose and wiped the tears from his cheeks. He glanced down the long table at the faces he loved, and then, holding his hands close to his right cheek, he said softly, "No, brother. I cannot go to Nuremberg. It is too late for me. Look, look what four years in the mines have done to my hands! The bones in every finger have been smashed at least once, and lately I have been suffering from arthritis so badly in my right hand that I cannot even hold a glass to return your toast, much less make delicate lines on parchment or canvas with a pen or a brush. No, brother ... for me it is too late."

One day, to pay respect and thanks to Albert for all that he had sacrificed, Albrecht Dürer painstakingly drew his brother's abused hands with palms together and thin fingers stretched skyward. He called his powerful drawing simply "Hands," but the entire world almost immediately opened their hearts to his great masterpiece and renamed his tribute of love "The Praying Hands."

What a wonderful and sacrificial love. And how impressive, how touching.

But how much more impressive is when we the Almighty God decides that His hand will be involved with us.

Throughout the Bible we will read about God's hand.

- God hand is present as Creator, as the one who made the whole universe.
- God's hand is there to push hard on someone as to punish and to schold

- God's hand is there to save
- God's hand wants to be involved in the history and

I. God's Hand and Unity

We have heard the prophecy from Ezekiel. God is asking the prophet to bring two poles, two sticks and place it in His hands. God will make one out of the two. God's hand will intervene, and will make out one.

We are here, churches of many denominations. How wonderful would be that we do not focus so much on what divides us but we would let God's hand to work among our midst to unite us.

There is one amazing fact in the prophecy of Ezekiel, namely, that though God, the Almighty created the universe, and He has the power to work without people, he still decides to use the human hands in the whole process. He asks the prophet to bring those poles in front of him and to work with him.

Jesus could have done all things by his power, but he decided to use the 12 disciples. And those 12 disciples changed the course of history.

Churches and ministers of St. Margaret's Bay, God can change the course of history once we let his hand to work through us and in us. Let us unite for His glory.

We are here together to pray, to repent and to pray that God's miracle may be done among us.

II. God's hand and the suffering nations

This year the Korean Christian developed the material for the *Week of Prayer*. Ezekiel's words gives hope to this suffering nation that God will gather His people again into one, calling them His own.

The prayer of the Korean nations is a cry for hope. The Korean nation is divided into two nations since 1948, for 60 long years.

Since the early 1960s, the number of Christians, particularly Protestants, has increased faster than in any other country, doubling every decade. By 1994 there were over 35,000 churches and 50,000 pastors, making the South Korean church one of the most vital and dynamic in the world.

In North Korea the situation is different. There are an estimated 200,000 Christians and they are beaten, arrested, tortured, or killed because of their faith, even in this moment as we are here.

All around the world people are praying during this week for the unity of the divided Korean nation and for the tortured Christians in North Korea. Christians and non Christians are dying there because of lack of food and lack of medication.

What can we do with our hands for them? How God can use our hand for soothing the suffering of this nation?

We can pray today, and we can commit to pray every day for there suffering and for their freedom. We can also offer tangible help.

The *Presbyterian World Service and Development* is ministering to suffering nations, among them to the North Korean people providing anti-TB medication and nutrient-like vitamins. This costs \$30 per person for 6 month. (Presbyterian Record, December 2008, "Real Gifts for Real People" <http://www.presbyterianrecord.ca/print.php?dir=200812&id=fromthemoderator>)

\$30 will provide anti-TB medication and vitamins for 1 person for 6 month, and that 6 month is what it takes to get healed from the disease of TB.

God might want to use your hands to reach out to your brothers and sisters in North Korea.

Today, your hand can be folded in prayer, bringing the tears of the Korean people to God and to ask Him to redeem the people there, to end their sufferings and pain.

We can lift our praying hands for other nations, who are fighting against each other, who are in war, who are causing suffering to each other.

III. God's stretched out hand on the cross

Ezekiel sees God as the one who unites, one who redeems.

God sent his Only son to purify, to renew and to liberate the world from all sins and division.

God decided to let his hand to be nailed to two poles bind together, to the Cross on the Mountain of Golghota. Just before dying, Jesus Christ, God's Only Son is praying:

I am coming to you; I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world. Holy Father! Keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one just as you and I are one.

Just before dying, just before stretching out his arms on the cross, just before letting His hands to be nailed to the cross, he is praying that His disciples may be one.

From the **two pieces of wood** which form his cross, Jesus reconciles us to God; with this, humanity is infused with new hope.

In spite of our sinfulness, in spite of our violence and wars, in spite of the disparity between rich and poor, in spite of our abuse of creation, in spite of disease and suffering, in spite of discrimination, and in spite of our disunity and divisions, Jesus Christ - through his outstretched hands on the cross - embraces all of creation and offers us God's peace.

In his hands we are one, as we are drawn to him who is lifted up on the cross.

In God's hand we are one. As we pray and minister in St. Margaret's Bay, let's have this eternal focus in front of us.

Amen