

THE HANDS TELL A STORY – 1 KINGS 8:54-63

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⁵⁴ When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven. ⁵⁵ He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying: ⁵⁶ “Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. ⁵⁷ May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us. ⁵⁸ May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers. ⁵⁹ And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day’s need, ⁶⁰ so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other. ⁶¹ But your hearts must be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.” ⁶² Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the LORD. ⁶³ Solomon offered a sacrifice of fellowship offerings to the LORD: twenty-two thousand cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of the LORD.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Your HANDS TELL A STORY. It’s really amazing what you can tell just from a person’s hands. I can remember when I was in college, one of my summer jobs was landscaping. I got up early in the morning and did all sorts of landscape activities – laying sod, planting trees, building retaining walls just to name a few. It didn’t take long for my hands to tell a story over the summer. My hands became more calloused from the digging and the lifting, my hands became scratched by the prickly junipers, they got dirty with dirt, and tanned with the sun. You could tell a lot about my summer activities just from my hands.

If you’re a more astute observer, you can glimpse into a person’s personality as well by their handshake, you can tell if a person takes care of their hands with lotion, the ladies can beautify their hands by painting their nails. If you listen to the palm readers, you might even be able to find out more just by the wrinkles on your hands. Everybody’s HANDS TELL A STORY.

It is no different with King Solomon’s hands in our first Scripture reading from this morning. It’s true, Solomon’s hands probably weren’t the first thing that drew your attention from that Scripture reading, but we see how Solomon’s HANDS TELL A STORY, a story that we would be wise to follow on this our Grand Opening at Esmond Station. THE HANDS TELL A STORY:

1. Lifted up toward heaven
2. Bestowing God’s blessing
3. Shown in action

THE HANDS TELL A STORY. The first thing Solomon's hands tell us is that they were lifted up toward heaven. Solomon had plenty of experience already with giving God glory and praise. When Solomon was just a little boy, shortly after he became king, God came to him and told him to ask for anything he wanted. The young lad showed wisdom back then in not asking for riches or fame, but just simple wisdom to lead God's people, the Israelites. God granted him this wisdom in abundance. So much wisdom that the Bible credits him with being the wisest man who ever lived, composing over 3,000 proverbs, and writing 1,000 songs.

But before Solomon could even "**spread his hands toward heaven**," he had to build God's holy house. The people of Israel had been in the land for about 80 years and they still used the portable worship facility called the tabernacle for their primary house of worship. King David, Solomon's father, had wanted to build God a house, but God said it would be Solomon who would build the Temple. As Solomon began his reign, he did remember to build God's house, and there was no expense spared. He built with the finest stone, cedar and pine, covered the inside with gold. All in all it took seven years to build from start to finish.

It was only after such a building project that Solomon could truly "**spread his hands toward heaven**," in thanksgiving to God. And what a story these hands tell. "All that we have is yours dear LORD. You hear us, not because of what we have done for you, but because of your grace and mercy, for this is what the LORD means." Hear Solomon's words, "**Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.**"

At the conclusion of Solomon's prayer to the Lord, we gain insight from 1 Chronicles, "**fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.**" What a sight to be seen, a visible representation of God with his people. A similar event happened when the Israelites dedicated the tabernacle when they were wandering in the desert. It was this fire that gave approval for all they had done, it was all done in a God-pleasing way.

Just as Solomon's hands lifted up toward heaven TELL THE STORY of thanksgiving to God, so our HANDS TELL A STORY of thanksgiving on this special occasion. For many of us, this is not the first time we have set foot in a church, this is not the first experience we are having with God. We have had experience with God in the past as well. For some of us, God called us to faith in the waters of holy baptism as infants. Others have experience of God working in their lives through the actions of God-fearing parents or friends. And so we lift up our holy hands toward heaven for all of these blessings God has granted us.

But there's a reason why there's so many of you here this morning. And that reason is we are celebrating the Grand Opening of our new worship location at Grace-Vail. We can lift up our hands toward heaven, in thanks for all the blessings God has given to this particular location of Grace. What was only a dream a few years ago has become a reality. And now he has blessed us with this wonderful facility to worship in and grow into. And while human hands were used in bringing these things to be, all credit and glory goes to God alone.

And in a similar attitude with the temple, no expense has been spared. It would have been very easy to just set up a few chairs, a music stand and have a few notes plunked on a keyboard, but we didn't do that. We made an effort to make a school gymnasium look like a church. We put time into planning our worship we give to the LORD. Because the God who created the universe deserves our very best. Our very best in worship, our very best in our lives.

(2)

Once Solomon rose from praying to God, he turned, “**and blessed the whole assembly.**” His HANDS TOLD A STORY, of bestowing a blessing. Not only did Solomon remind the people of God's fulfilled promises in the past, he asked for God's blessing going forward. Solomon, the wise man, knew this celebration was about more than just that day. He asked God to be with them, “**never leave them nor forsake them,**” he asked for the Lord “**to turn their hearts to him and walk in his ways.**” Why would Solomon ask for such things? He wasn't just reminding the people of Israel to stick with the Lord, but he recognized that it is only God who can keep you close to him. It is only God's Word that can strengthen faith. And he knew the sinful nature's propensity to forget that. It is the sinful nature that draws us away from God's word, and it is only God who can draw to him.

Solomon did not only ask for God to keep the Israelites close to him, but he also prayed for himself. But it was not a self-centered prayer, he prayed for himself to be a good leader, to uphold God's cause. Because he had a vision in mind for the kingdom of Israel and the worship of the one, true God and he did not want to be distracted from it. His HANDS TOLD A STORY as he asked for God's blessing upon himself.

Our HANDS TELL THE SAME STORY, our mouths ask for the same blessing from God. We know that without God all our efforts would fail. So we are not only reminded of God's blessings upon this little corner of his kingdom, but we pray that he would continue to bless us. We ask for his blessing as we have this vision for Grace-Vail that we might hold true to the vision of telling more people about the message they need to hear.

We ask for God's blessing upon our own life, that we personally, might continue to have this zeal in our hearts. Because it's more than just about today, it's about going forward. God works his blessings through human hands, hands like yours and mine. We pray that we might have “**hearts fully committed to the Lord our God,**” and as a result committed to letting God work through us with our own actions.

(3)

HANDS TELL ANOTHER STORY too. We see Solomon's hands shown in action. “**Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the Lord.**” After the praying was all done, Solomon put his hands in action, by offering sacrifices to the Lord. And what a sacrifice it was. 22,000 cattle, 120,000 sheep and goats. God deserves nothing but the best. Solomon's hands naturally followed with action, being grateful for everything God had done.

Our hands too are shown in action. It doesn't matter if you are a member of Grace, Koine, or just a guest. Our HANDS TELL A STORY. It's a story of response. And I'm not just talking about when we pass the offering plate around here in a few minutes. I'm talking about putting our hands to work in God's kingdom. How do we put my hands to work in God's kingdom going forward? It can be easy on this

festival day to put our hands to work. But what story will our hands be saying tomorrow, next week, next month? Jesus said, **“the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”**

I pray that God works in your heart to participate in the ministry God has set before us here at Grace Lutheran Church. God has given each one of you a unique gift, a gift that can be used to his glory and his name. Maybe that gift is helping directly here at Grace, perhaps that gift is in helping reach out to others. Maybe your gift is to insert a little bit of fun and laughter, or perhaps it is to comfort and lift up. Maybe your gift is to help financially support this church. How do you put your hands to work in God’s kingdom? Because if we really believe what we really believe is true, we can’t help but do this.

Our HANDS CERTAINLY TELL A STORY too, and not just what profession we are a part of either. Our Christian HANDS TELL A STORY. What story do we want our hands to tell? We don’t want to tell the story of just sitting on our hands all day and not asking what we can do. We want to do something with them. Our hands can tell the story of our Savior, and our Savior’s hands which were pierced for us so that we might get to heaven. And even while we raise our hands in thanks for the visible blessings around us this morning, this is ultimately just raising our hands in thanks for God’s great love. Amen.