

“In Whose Hands?”
Job 1:1, 2:1-10
October 8, 2006
San Dimas Community Church, United Church of Christ
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I promise I'll talk about today's scripture lesson from Job, but it will take a little while to get there. I became intrigued by the UCC theme for today: "In Whose Hands?" The human hand shows us God's genius of creation. Hands are both beautiful and magnificent in their abilities to perform many and varied functions. We know this to be true if we've ever injured our hand or been thwarted in our ability to use it or if carpal tunnel syndrome has meant that every time we use it we are in pain. I googled some pictures of hands that I'd like to share with you now.

Hands can be used for great purposes as well as great pain. Last Monday morning we awoke to a story of hands used to kill innocent little girls in a one room school house. How can this be? We are grieved to our core with the senselessness of these acts, and we pray for those bereaved at such loss. Yet, we learned something from the Amish Christians who placed their own grief within the larger context of a world where good and evil both exist, sometimes side by side, and because out of their faith and trust in God, in whose hands all are held, they found comfort and the ability to think beyond their grief even to the needs of the family of the murderer. It's almost beyond imagination to understand this.

I really wanted to preach a happy sermon this week, (we hear enough bad news) but the lectionary text from the Book of Job didn't provide me with a happy scripture, so I want to take this opportunity to share some good news. We are going to save about \$3500 on our church property and liability insurance. This savings does require that some of us do *something good with our hands* for the good of our children.

Insurance companies are now requiring "due diligence" by churches in regard to those working with children. This means background checks on adults working with minors. I have to say I resisted this idea as long as I could because it felt intrusive. But we can no longer avoid this process if we are to have appropriate coverage for our church. Now coincidentally this news came to me 10 days before we are to celebrate "The Children's Sabbath" next Sunday. So I began to think that those of us who work with our children, have an opportunity to witness our love and commitment to them in a unique way, and to initiate a standard for this church both now and in the future which says to all: "Here at SDCC,UCC hands are used to love, protect, encourage, and teach. They will not be used to mistreat or abuse."

Today or next Sunday I invite any of you who wish to work with our minor children and youth now or in the future, to give permission for Church Screening to run a background check. This check will not tell us if you've had lots of speeding tickets or parking tickets. This check is designed to reveal felonies and if those felonies were with children. Many of you will not need to fill out this form because you do not work directly in the teaching or transporting of youth, and if you don't work with our children, we hope you will not fill out a form because it costs \$10 per form to process.

The reason I took time to give this information to everyone within a sermon is because it is very important. We want our entire community to know that we've done all we can to assure that our children are held in loving hands. You can invite your friends to this church knowing that their children will be safe. Since I don't want to ask anyone to do something I am not willing to do myself, this is my form and Tom's form, and we are paying the \$10 each for the processing. It is a small gift we wish to give to this church and to our children. Forms are available for you to look at or to take with you today. And please don't hesitate to call with questions for our church leaders or for me. This is our chance to hold our children in loving and protecting hands and to hold our church's well-being in loving hands as well.

Now for Job...Job is the Book of the Bible we think about when we ask questions of why good people suffer and what God has to do with it. Job is a righteous man. He doesn't deserve what he gets, and he knows it. He didn't deserve his great wealth and large family; and he doesn't deserve it being taken away, and he does not deserve his immense physical suffering. But Job

understands he is part of something larger than himself. Job knows it's not all about I, me, mine. God's universe is much larger than his own small place in it. He asks the question: "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" His suffering poses for us the question: "in just whose hands" are we held?

Now, fortunately, we're supposed to talk on Job for several more Sundays so we don't have to come to complete resolution on the question of undeserved suffering. But our lesson today is this: In spite of his loss, in spite of intense pain, Job has a deep knowing expressed in words of his time and place, that "God has the whole world in his hands." This doesn't mean I will not suffer. It means it's not about me; it's about God; and it means God does not leave me to suffer alone in silence. God is with me; God suffers with my suffering; God grieves with my losses; God cries with my tears.

Elie Wiesel, the Jewish theologian who survived Auschwitz, tells this story. One morning in the concentration camp two prisoners stood outside looking at the gallows, and they see three hanging bodies. Two men are on the outside; and in the center is a child. The men have died; their weight causes death to come quickly. The child, on the other hand, is light; he struggles against the inevitable death; his small body cannot even bring about an end to his suffering. In disgust, one of the men watching ask the other, "where is God now?" The second man points to the gallows upon which the child struggles, and simply says, "he is there."

As we sing our closing hymn today, keep in mind the story of Horatio Spafford who wrote the words. Spafford was a devout Presbyterian church elder who lost a fortune in the great Chicago fire. Two years later the family decided to vacation in Europe. At the last moment Horatio was detained by business, and Anna and their four girls went on ahead. On the voyage their ship was accidentally rammed by another vessel and sank within minutes.

Anna was picked up unconscious but the four little girls drowned. Horatio immediately left Chicago to bring his wife home. On the Atlantic crossing, the captain of the ship called Horatio to his cabin to tell him that they were passing over the spot where his four daughters had perished. As he passed over their watery grave, he wrote the hymn: "When peace, like a river, attendeth my soul, when sorrows like sea billows roll, Whatever my lot, you have taught me to say, 'It is well, it is well with my soul.'"

Knowing that it is in good hands, God's hands, that we are cradled, may it be well with our souls. AMEN