



When you arrived this morning you received a nail. The nail is a horse shoe nail which is used to attach a metal horse shoe to the hoof of a horse. A nail can be such an insignificant thing. But, despite that fact that it is small and innocent looking, that you buy them by the pound or that when you are building something you drive them into the wood and then you completely forget about them. Yet, with a nail you can build a house, shoe a horse or hang a picture. However, because a nail can be so sharp it can also be deadly. It can flatten a tire and it is also possible that with a nail you can cause tremendous pain. At this time of the year, nails take on a special meaning; they have become very central to the Easter story. It was with nails shaped much like the nail you hold in your hand, (though much larger and a much courser cut), which were driven through our Jesus' wrists and feet; nails that attached Jesus to the cross where he would die.

For the next few weeks, I want us to look at the nails from the cross from 3 different angles. I want to do that because, while we all know that the our faith is based on the profound events of that first Easter, we also know that for our spiritual walk it is important to allow our hearts to stand at the foot of the cross and be overwhelmed again with the tragedy, wonder and the life changing power of the cross again. This morning, I want us to look at My Nail (Inscribed in the Palm of His Hand); next week, His Nail and finally a Nail for Us All. I have given you a nail to take with you; use it for a book mark, put it on your dresser, tape it to your mirror or in place it to your wallet. Over the next few weeks as you look at it, remember it took a nail like this one to pay for your sins, your life and your eternity. But also remember that this nail opens an eternity of possibilities for you and me. I want to begin our walk toward Easter morning by reminding you again of God's love for you as an individual.

I. A Handful of Love

Late one night, Jesus had an encounter with a man name Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a man who had spent his life trying to do enough things, keep enough rules to be good enough to care for his eternal soul and yet Jesus knew that despite his PhD in Religious Studies, he couldn't grasp how God could change his life eternally. So Jesus simply said, *"Nicodemus, you need to be born again."* And when Jesus saw Nicodemus' bewildered look, He replied, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16) Who is the "whoever"?

- Mark 16:16, *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."*
- John 4:14, *"Whoever drinks of the water I give him will never thirst."*
- John 6:37, *"Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."*
- Revelation 22:17, *"Whoever is thirsty, let him come, and whoever wishes. Let him take the free gift of the water of life."*

You and I are the "whoever". I think Jesus was saying, let me explain to you what God carried in His hands that first Easter.

A. Think of Who God Gave

Think of what must have been going through Jesus' mind as He spoke these words to Nicodemus, *"Nick, I am sure you won't be able to grasp this but when I came to earth, somehow, because I and the Father are one, He came to earth as well. You see, God not only gave His son for you but He also gave Himself for you. There was nothing more that He could give."*

Don't miss what it means to give His one and only Son. As I have been reading the Easter story again, I am parked on this verse. It reminded me of some of my friends who have lost a child; the pain of loss and grief they went through. I realized that I have no way of quantifying if it is harder to lose a child at 5 weeks old or 25 years old, but I do know that God, the Father, was together with the Son from before Eternity began. That must have made the pain which came with the giving of His Son beyond description. Yet, He was willing to do that for us. I am sure Jesus tried to explain the WHO God gave for our sins, the eternal Son so that He would see how costly, gut wrenching and profound the gift was.

B. Think of How He Gave His Son

When God gave His Son, it wasn't just to see Him leave home to take up a new profession somewhere else. It was to go into a cruel world and a crueler fate; in order to do that he had to lay aside many things. You see He who had created the world with a word > now had to pound nails to build a table. He went from being the creator of mankind to one who would die at their hands. He who owned the Universe and created life, experienced hunger, thirst, pain and death. He, who helped form the soldiers in their mother's womb, sat quietly by and pretended not to know who hit Him as He sat blindfolded before them. He who could have called 10,000 angels to free Him from the cross but He stayed on the cross as He felt the sin of the world moving toward Him and heard God turn to walk away from Him. That is the HOW MUCH of God love He carried in His hands for you.

C. Think of When He Gave His Son

John 3:10 – 15, *"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."*

Look again at verse 11. Look at the word Jesus used to describe who is talking here. He used the word 'we.' What He is saying is that what is being said by Him is at the same time, being said by God the Father. That means that what is happening here has been part of their conversation over eons of time. Someone described it as "love over time." What Jesus is explaining to Nicodemus is that Jesus' coming to earth was planned before the foundations of the world. Even before sin happened in the garden, God had already planned to send Jesus into the world. Stop for a moment and think what that meant. It means that down through history, as the Father and Son were together, they knew that Jesus would soon have to come to our world, to live and to die.

Now, while some men, in a moment of generosity and excitement may pledge a great gift to care for someone else, God was forced to look at the gift He was to give, year after year, century after century and not break their promise and change their mind. Just think what it would have been like if you were a mother or father and knew that on a certain day, your son would go and walk the road Jesus had to walk, to be mocked, beaten and then crucified and there your boy would die. It would colour and cloud every hour, every day of your life together. If you had the ability to move through time so you could show up on that fateful Friday and stop it from happening, what would you do to change your child's fate? God didn't. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His Son."* In order to do that, year after year, He had to wrestle to keep His promise.

- WHY? Because He loved you. He knew there was no other way for our sin to be paid for. If you have ever doubted your worth or how much God loves you, think again. Think of what He carried in His hands as Jesus entered the world.
- WHAT? A love that gave His son.
- HOW? Into a world He knew would mistreat him.
- WHEN? Over time, knowing what it meant to send Jesus.

Yet He/They stuck with the plan even when it came time for the nails to do their work. That love should overwhelm us; the love He has for us caused Him to go all the way and take our nail for us.

Personalize it

The best way I can explain His love is like this. Look down at your hands, turn them over and look at them closely. You see, your hands and my hands all tell a story, don't they? This scar happened as I fell into the fire when I was very young boy. This scar was when I tried climbing down the steep side of a barn roof as a kid; I slid down the roof hanging unto a tar rope, embedding the tar in my hands and not letting go only because I knew if I let go, I would probably have broken my neck. This happened when cutting gyp-rock with an exacto knife. When I worked in the coal mine, my hands always had black coal embedded in them. But now my hands are lily-white and to free of calluses. You see, our hands tell a story of who we are and where we have been.

The other day I came across a fascinating verse in Isaiah 49:16, in which God turns to Israel, His people, and says, *"I have inscribed you in the palms of my hand."* It is a similar statement to the one we often hear today which says, *"I know it like the back of my hand."* In other words, His relationship with Israel as a nation and as His people was such that it was as if He had their names tattooed on the palm of His hands. If He ever forgets their name or confuses their name, all He has to do is look at His hands and there in front of him, is written in bold blue ink, the name of the Jewish people.

I understand this because, being Dyslexic, at times I will draw a complete blank when it comes to a name or even my phone number, (often I will dial a phone number 4 or 5 times before I get it right.) For example I will often call Mark, Matt and Matt, Mark. Mark especially hates it when I call him Max which is the dog's name. One day, when Mark was young, I took him to the Medi-clinic and they asked me what Mark's middle name was, I drew a complete blank. Then I said his middle name was David William. Later that night, at supper, Mark was so excited. He said, *"Mom, I never realized my middle name was David William, it is so cool!"* To which Kathy said, *"Mark, I am sorry but that is Matt's middle name not yours."*

When I read this verse and it says that every time God happened to look down at the palms of His hands, my name is written on them, (He will never forget it.) He can't help but remember the names of those He loves and had promised to protect. It gives me great comfort. As marvelous as that relationship was and as intimate His relationship was with them in the Old Testament times, it is nothing compared to the one that He established in the New Testament after the cross. Three days after He died, He rose again. Three days after His death, we find Him standing in front of the disciples in the Upper Room, saying to Thomas, *"Come over here; come feel the nail prints in my hands."*

No longer did He just have names tattooed on the palms of His hands, but He had rough scars caused by the nails which had ripped open His flesh, which cried out, *"Do you remember the names of those who you loved enough to hang of the cross for? Do you remember for whom you stayed on that cross as the sky turned black and as the sins of the*

world came closer and closer?" I believe in that moment on the cross, much like in a car accident, as time stood still and in a millisecond your mind processes so many things from your life, in Jesus' case, He saw each of our faces, accepted each of our sins and personally wrote us in the palm of His hands. Even now as He sits in glory and looks down at His hands, He has no trouble remembering you and me. He has more to remember than mere names written on the palms of His hands, He has scars, deep holes in His hands, which remind Him of the names of each of those who He loved enough to die to forgive.

Those nail scars are very personal; the Bible says He died for us as individuals. That truth struck me again the other day as I was at the Country Hills Superstore, (our little United Nations store,) as person after person walked by, every shape, size, color with varied backgrounds, accents, education, wealth and jobs. It hit me that everyone in that mass of people was an individual and in some supernatural way, Jesus received the nails for each of them as individuals. Here is the fascinating thing, despite the fact that we live in a busy and crowded world, when Christ died on the cross, He somehow died for us as individuals and the nails He received were for us, (the "whoever" of John 3:16) as individuals. As God, He knew each of our names as each of our sins were placed on Him on the cross. Just as your hands tell of story of your life experiences, His hands bear scars which remind Him of you and I as individuals. Even now, as He looks at His hands in GLORY, He sees much more than names inscribed on the palms of His hands, He sees the scars that bear our names on His hands.

If you ever doubt His love, look at your nail and remember the scars by which He remembers you and the love that allowed those scars to be imprinted on Him. Remember how deep His love was to bear your nail on the cross.

II. His Pierced Hands

Let's just keep with the hand imagery for a little bit longer. As I was thinking about the imagery of His pierced hands, I started to ask, "*What does that mean to me today?*," or more specifically, "*How would He use His hands today on my behalf?*" Let me list a few:

A. To Confirm We Are Forgiven

Do you ever find that when you are struggling with a particular sin in your life or try to conquer a particular habit and when you keep failing in the same area again and again, you almost want to give up? You almost get too ashamed to go back to God and ask for forgiveness. It is then I picture Him with His hands outstretched saying, "*If I was willing to go all the way to the cross to offer you forgiveness, don't you think I want to help you overcome your struggle today? 2 Corinthians 12:9 says, 'My grace is sufficient.' We can beat it together so don't give up.*" His pierced hands help me keep on coming back and keep on trying to rely more on His power so I will win over my struggle. His pieced hands give me hope to keep on trying.

B. They Are the Filter Through Which God Sees Us

Do you ever get this picture of God sitting in heaven, shaking His head saying, "*They did it again; will they never get it right?*" (By the way, this is probably a fair comment at times.) If you ever feel that way, read Hebrews 4:14,15, "*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*"

It says that when God ever wonders if we will ever get it right, Jesus stands up and walks toward the Father, raises His hands, palms up and says, *“Father, Dave’s sins are completely paid for. Here’s the proof. My Holy Spirit resides within him, so there is hope.”* It is as if He raises His pieced hands and they become the filter through which God, the Father sees us. The glow from Jesus envelopes us and God sees us as completely holy. It is the same thing that will happen when I stand before God in Glory. Jesus will say, *“Look Father, his sins are paid for. He is completely pure in me.”* I will walk into the pure glory of heaven and not only be home but in the presence of God and feel at home. His hands give me peace and hope for they are and will be the filter through which God sees me.

C. His Hands Should Direct Our Lives

I sometimes see Jesus’ hands raised saying, *“Stop.”* Have you ever sat down and asked yourself, *“Where were you going before Jesus met you? How did the Nail and cross behind it change the path of your life?”* For some of you, the answer would be that you would be dead today because the path you were taking due to your lifestyle eating you alive. Others of us would have not been able to walk through some of the pain you have experienced without losing your mind. Others would have lost your family, lost your business. All of us would have lost much that is good in our lives. There has been a time when He has raised those hands and as you saw them, you stopped what you were doing and changed the course of your life. Galatians 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* His hands help change the direction of our lives.

D. His Hands Should Empower Our Lives

There are also times when I come to the Lord and I need His strength just to keep going or to gain the faith to believe that anything can be done to change a situation. It is then I see those hands outstretched again and I get a clear view of those nail scars and hear Him say, *“If I can break the bonds of death, don’t you think I can heal that illness, fix that situation, forgive that sin and care for your needs?”* And I hear Paul whisper Philippians 4:13, *“I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”* His Hands give me the courage and strength to carry on.

A young boy who loved to golf, was only allowed to golf using ‘air balls’ (plastic balls with holes in them) in his back yard to practice. One day, when he thought his parents were not home, he decided to try golfing in his back yard with real golf balls. Using all his strength he drove the ball with all his might only to see it hook to the right and crash through the kitchen window. As the glass shattered, he heard a scream from within the house. He ran inside and there lying on the floor was his mother bleeding from a cut on her forehead. Fearing he had killed her, he ran toward her, only to have her rise and hug him and say, *“I’m ok. Don’t worry I am ok.”* From the moment he heard her words, something new began to grow between his mom and himself. He realized that if she could love him with blood running down her face and glass from a broken window across the floor which came from his direct disobedience, he knew that nothing could stop her from loving him. And he knew that some things like golfing in the backyard would never happen again.

The wonder of Easter is that as you stand near the cross and catch glimpse at the how and because of the nail, our name is inscribed in the palm of His hand. We realized that it represents Jesus amazing love and forgiveness that it should leave us amazed at His love for us and drive us into a deeper more obedient relationship with Him.

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