Reading: Luke 23; 44 - 56

The week began with waving hands – people cheering, waving palm branches. They waved their hands to honour the king. He rode, on a donkey, into Jerusalem. He passed through their hands.
Then there were the money-changers hands, backwards and forward across their tables in the Temple forecourt. Backwards and forwards, greedy, grabbing hands taking the hard earned coins of the worshippers - selling the Temple coins and the sacrifices, making a little here and little there. Backwards and forwards – deals across the tables. He overturned the tables beneath their hands.
Then Jesus own hands, in the water, washing the dirty, smelly, knobbly feet of his disciples. Jesus own hands showing the ways of service.
Around him the hands of companionship, his disciples sharing the unleavened bread, wine, lamb, charoset and bitter herbs, sharing the Passover meal. Jesus shared with those hands.
Jesus hands again, clasped in prayer this time. 'Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by, yet not my will but yours.' Jesus prayed with those hands.
The hands of the betrayer held out to grasp his silver coins, embracing Jesus and sealing his betrayal with a kiss. Jesus was captured by those hands.
There were hands raised in denial, Peter's hands, 'No! I don't know him' 'I have nothing to do with him' The cock crowed three times and Jesus was wounded by those hands.
He was brought before Pilate – but Pilate's hands were clean. He wanted to keep them so – and thus did nothing. He washed his hands of Jesus and in so doing condemned him to death.
The hands of the crowd were jeering now – clenched fists and ugly gestures. 'Crucify him, crucify him' He had not delivered what they wanted. He would not deliver what they wanted – at least not in the way they wanted it. Jesus was rejected by those hands.
Lashes and whips and a crown of thorns – the torturing hands of the priests and the soldiers. 'Are you the King of the Jews' 'If you are the Messiah, tell us who hit you.' Jesus was bloodied by these hands.
Helping hands on the way to Golgotha, Simon of Cyrene, carrying the cross for part of the way.
Finally strong hands stretched him on the cross and nailed him in place.
Rejected, denied, betrayed, beaten, tortured, broken. Jesus puts himself in God's hands. Father into your hands, I commend my Spirit.
According to Luke, Jesus' dying was not only painful to him. It was also painful to the whole creation, which twisted and gasped in its own way

as he did on the cross. As his light began to go out, darkness came over the whole land. The sun hid its face and for three hours the world lay sleepless through this unnatural night as Jesus' breath grew shallower and shallower. Finally there was the sound of something ripping--a cloth, a shroud, the sky itself?--followed by a loud voice from the cross: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Then he let out his last breath and as Barbara Brown Taylor comments, every creature left alive learned the meaning of silence.

But for Jesus, these words are not a cry of abandonment but a claiming of hope. He had come from God and he gives himself back to God. In one final powerful act. It is this, last cry, that takes away Jesus the victim, and shows us instead, Jesus, the Saviour, the lover of the world. In this final act, Jesus decides, that he will give himself back into God's hands.

Jesus introduced us to the shocking power of sacrifice, which can turn something that looks for all the world like loss into something that feels for all the world like gain. According to Frederick Buechner, "To sacrifice something is to make it holy by giving it away for love." Even if someone is trying to pry it out of your hands. Even if those standing around you laugh and shout that you have no choice, you have a choice. You can still decide how you will let go. You can still open your hands at the last moment and give up what others thought they were taking from you. You can even make it holy by doing it for love.

So, Jesus gives himself into God's hands. He takes himself out of the reach of all the hands that had beaten, betrayed, denied and broken him, the hands that had rejected him, wanted nothing to do with him, crucified him. He takes himself beyond what any of these hands can do and gives himself back into God's hands.

Father, into your hands, I commend my Spirit!

Prayer: God of love, hold us in your hands of love. Soothe our restless minds and calm our weary souls. As we feel your hands enfold us, so may we have the courage and the strength to reach out to others with hands of hope. Hear our prayers in Jesus Name. Amen