

2 Chronicles 15:1-7  
1 John 1:1-4

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Devon, Pennsylvania, 19333  
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Ordination and Installation of Officers  
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## IN YOUR HANDS

*"But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your hands shall be rewarded." 2 Chronicles 15:7*

Only a mere 2% of our DNA, we're told, is different from our closest animal relative, the chimpanzee. Yet somewhere in those labyrinthine minority lies the protein coding for these—hands. Next to our minds, hands are surely the most characteristic feature of our species. They give expression to our art, literature, music, building, tool-making, sport. They express our compassion, healing, anger, emotions, and virtually every facet of our creativity. Every day, I understand, the hand performs 1,000 subtly different movements involving exacting precision and coordination. No wonder Immanuel Kant called the hand, "The outside brain of man."

When Jesus healed, it was almost exclusively by touch. When God created the first human, as the Genesis story tells it—and the Bible is always more interested in theological meaning rather than historical reporting—there's an indelible picture of intimacy and caring in the image of God scooping clay from the moist earth, fashioning it by hand, lifting it to the divine mouth and blowing into that still glistening form the spirit of life.

To you who have been installed this day as Trustees, Elders and Deacons, while we act symbolically and speak metaphorically of placing our trust in your hands, we do so with good reason. It is from your hands that will issue from day to day the custodial care, the program leadership, and acts of compassion that influence this family church, this church family.

When Europe was in the volcanic heat of war in 1942, a lone bomber flew over a certain village by night. Far from any military base or industrial city the aircraft was apparently way off course, and so had not released its full payload. It was unlikely to reach its home base with such a load. So the bomb was released and it landed on the village green. No one was killed or injured, but a prized historical statue at the center of the green was demolished. It had been a statue of Christ with arms outstretched.

In the light of day the villagers groped around for fragments of the statue hoping to repair it, and they did well. But they could find no trace, not the slightest evidence of the hands. Distraught, the villagers discussed alternatives. They could fashion new hands, some said. No, they should build a new statue, said others, because an old statue of Christ himself with new hands would be a visual eyesore. Then some wise soul with a heart attuned to the significance of the moment suggested that they leave Christ without hands. “After all,” she said, “*We* are the hands of Christ.” And so it remained. And daily to this day they need no more compelling reminder.

This “laying on of hands” that we performed this day, this commissioning, is not a mere ritual gesture, a benign rite of passage. It expresses what Bruce Metzger has called “the donation and reception of a gift.” There was a gift, a duty, and a heartfelt expectation in those hands, passed down for thirty-four centuries from the earliest Elders of Israel, and through the apostolic benedictions of the first-century of the church.

Today you took an oath. It was not a contract, like promising to sell two bushels of apples a week at an agreed price, but a covenant. A contract is a two way agreement between parties A and B. A covenant is three way between you, the church, and God.

When the Roman governor Pliny was reporting back to the Emperor Trajan about the Christians in Bythnia, he wrote: “They are accustomed to bind themselves to by an oath to commit neither theft nor robbery, nor adultery; never to break their word, never to deny a pledge that has been made when summoned to answer for it.” We would do well to be so resolute in our pledge keeping.

You are the hands of Christ to this congregation:

- teaching them how to live as Christ;
- comforting them with gentleness and compassion
- lifting them when they fall;
- rebuking them when they are in error because of the idle tongue, or peace breaking;
- bringing the gift of stillness in the midst of others’ storms;
- embracing when you would share their joy.

There is a whole ministry in your hands, the extensions of Christ’s own. Use them wisely and well. And may the Lord Jesus bless you, and bless us through your ministry.

Amen.