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This morning I would like to show you a painting, a German artist Albrecht Dürer’s *Praying Hands*.



Many of you might have seen this painting before. There is a story related to this picture. Dürer had a friend named Franz Knigstein. Both of them were poor young men, and they struggled to keep studying art. So they decided that one of them would work to support while the other studied art. They drew lots, and Dürer won. They agreed that when Dürer was successful he would help his friend study.

After a long time, when Dürer had attained success, he went back to his hometown to keep the promise with his friend. But, he found that Knigstein had worked at hard manual labour to support him, so his fingers had become stiff and twisted. He could not study painting any longer. Dürer felt sorry and grateful for his friend’s sacrifice, amazing support, and constant prayers. He sketched his friend’s hands, and later completed a great masterpiece known as ‘Praying Hands.’

What a beautiful story! Some of you might have heard this before. But, unfortunately this story is not true; it is fake news! Dürer was born into a wealthy family, so there was no problem to study painting. Furthermore, the hands in the picture were his. Look at the hands again. They are not the hands of a labourer. And the cloth is also not for workers. His portrait drawn in 1504 is crucial evidence.



His long fingers look very similar to those in the ‘Praying Hands.’ In fact, I would like to talk about his life. This is the reason I started today’s reflection from his picture. He was a respected and influential artist in his days; he was the

first landscape painter transforming the view of nature. On top of that, he was a pioneer in the area of actual mathematics and applied geometry. Yes, he was a genius. But, his life was much more impressive than those merits.

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Two things caught my eyes. First, he broke the guild system of professionals. In those days professionals made guilds to keep their knowledge and technical secrets within their area of expertise. The guild system was one of the primary causes of the big gap between the rich and the poor in the middle ages.

Dürer broke the custom; he did not make or join in those associations and tried to share his knowledge in various areas by writing books in German, an ordinary language, rather than in Latin. It was shocking news at that time because it demolished the hierarchical foundation of power and knowledge. He tried to make a more just and fair society.

The other thing that also caught my eye was that he was an active supporter of Martin Luther’s Reformation movement. For example, whenever Luther prepared for a new book, Dürer donated willingly and bought the book to read. His support of the Reformation is directly connected to his egalitarian spirit.

He believed that all human beings are equal before God, that God’s scripture and all the liturgies should be translated into everyday languages for ordinary people to access and understand, and that God invites all of us, not only priests, to his ministry for peace, justice and salvation.

Now, we are looking at his hands again, his praying hands.



For what did he pray? He would have prayed for a just society in which all people could enjoy their lives equally and fairly within God’s grace and compassion. The reason that his praying hands shine is that his life was so beautiful.

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You may see this painting as well.



This is “Christ in Gethsemane” painted by a German artist Heinrich Hofmann in 1886. After finishing the last supper, Jesus went out and prayed at Gethsemane. The apostle Luke described Jesus’ praying there as follows: “Being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”

For what did he pray then? He prayed for the kingdom of God; he prayed for the salvation of human beings through his sacrifice; he prayed for the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, and all those in need.

His passion, death and resurrection were extensions of his prayers. Yes, he came to the earth to pray for his loving people scattered like sheep without a shepherd. To follow Jesus means to participate in Jesus’ prayer for the world and the church in words and actions.

We gathered this morning to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection. He was resurrected, but the wounds in his body did not disappear. He showed his disciples those wounds after being resurrected. The holes from the nails in his hands and feet signify his love and concern for all of us. He is still interceding for the world through wordless groans and calling us to pray together in words and actions.

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Sisters and brothers,

Let us deeply reflect on Jesus’ hands, Dürer’s hands, and our hands. For what do you pray now? Amen.