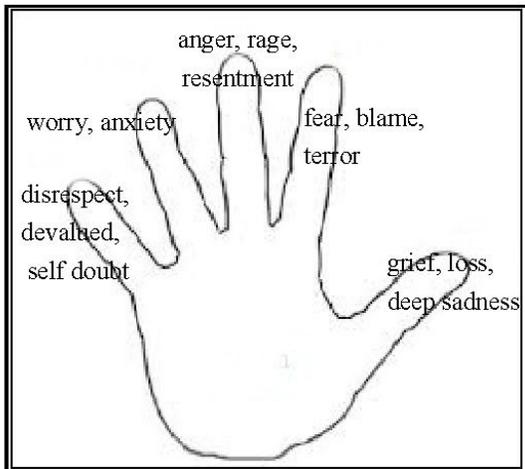


# Preparing for Peace

By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

## Mark 1: 1-8



*The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, [a] the Son of God, [b] 2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" [c]—3 "a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" 4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the*

*forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with [e] water, but he will baptize you with [f] the Holy Spirit."*

This has been a tough week for a lot of folks.

- There has been illness
- Pain
- Violence
- Abuse
- Fire
- Fear
- Death

Some of these issues have been experienced by people we know. Some of these issues have been experienced by strangers. Some of us have been subject to at least a few of these life experiences. I would say we could really use some PEACE right about now, and so it's a good thing that we have lit the second candle of Advent, and are greeted with today's reassuring lesson from Mark:

*1:1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 1:2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 1:3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"*

God is on the job. That is good news. We are not stranded with these difficult feelings and ordeals. Someone is coming to help. Someone is coming in the tradition of Isaiah who offered the hope of a coming peace that would "Comfort, comfort" God's people with tender words and life changing actions. Isaiah proclaimed that God was creating a time when "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain." In other words, the playing field would be leveled and we would experience peace.

Not so long ago that someone who God sent was a man named John (cousin to one, Jesus of Nazareth). John stood in the wilderness of Israel's experience and cried out: *Repent!* The word "repent" translates to "change", "behave differently", "turn away from or turn toward."

I have heard folks say that it is hard to change. Change is hard. I agree. It is difficult for us to change all by ourselves. Fortunately, neither Isaiah or

John expect us to do all the work. We are called to prepare for change. Make ourselves open to change. Put our trust in God to complete the changes that will bring us peace...and that is a different thing altogether. We don't have to fix fear. We don't have to be the ones who fiddle with the fall out of fires, or violence, or death. Our faith teaches us that the part we play in the ultimate transformation is to prepare.

*"Well those are pretty words, Todd, but how do we do that?"*

Of course there is no one answer. We don't all have to take training to become firefighters. We don't all have to learn domestic violence intervention techniques. We don't all have to learn the fine art of grief counseling. There are a variety of gifts. Mine is not to climb into a burning fire. Pretty sure I couldn't even carry the equipment needed to enter that arena. I'll leave that to Lisette!

Something we can probably all do is "pray" and in particular, pray by putting our hand into God's hands.

In my training as a trauma awareness specialist I was introduced to a practice known as *Jin Shin Jyutsu*. It is named after the Japanese man who created the art during the 1950's.

To practice this art as people of faith (not a mechanical technique, but an interactive experience) we are called to put our hand into God's hands, and allow God to hold the emotions that seem like mountains that need leveling or valleys that need lifting. We prepare for a peace that our faith teaches, is ultimately given by God.

I'd like to teach you this practice today, so that you can prepare for and perhaps encounter God's peace in a new way.

I'd like to teach you this practice today so that you can share it with others, like John shared baptism, in anticipation of the transforming that the Holy desires to bring about in our lives.

Now before you start taking notes or worrying that you won't remember this, I have created a little diagram on the back table that you can bring home with you. I'll also attach the diagram to the sermon I post online. So, worry no more...about that, anyway!

We begin by recognizing that the Holy Spirit moves through our entire body. God's love is pulsing through us with every breath we take, with every move we make. The Spirit moves through pathways that the Eastern traditions call: meridians. If you've ever experienced acupuncture you may have heard this term. A meridian is really just a channel, a pathway, through which God's energy flows.

Jin Shin Jyutsu noted that there were over 14,000 pathways within our ten fingers. How he counted them I do not know. It may be number like 40 in the Bible, it means, "a lot."

These pathways correspond to our emotions and what Jin Shin Jyutsu observed was that each finger was connected to a specific feeling.

The thumb is about grief, loss, deep sadness.

The pointer finger is about blame, fear, terror

The middle finger is about anger, rage, resentment

The ring finger is about worry, anxiety

The little finger is about disrespect, feeling devalued, self doubt

Equipped with this information, we are ready to prepare for peace.

We begin by using our dominant hand to represent God or Jesus. We use our non dominant hand to represent us. We hold each finger and focus God's care and healing on the event that corresponds to the emotion of that finger. We linger there for a couple of minutes or until we feel a pulse in the held finger, and then we take our God hand away, push the feelings into the ground where they are neutralized, and then move on to the next finger.

For example, I am feeling sad for David whose mother died yesterday. The feelings might feel like a mountain that I cannot get over. I prepare for God's peace by allowing God to hold my thumb, and breathe quietly while thinking about that grief. When I experience a shift in the emotion, when the valley starts to feel lifted, the crooked path, straight, I recognize God's work, and release the grief into the ground where it becomes more neutral. I thank God, and move on to the next finger. I can continue doing this until I feel the work of the Spirit bringing me beyond preparation to actual peace.

Let's take a few minutes now to practice.

I'll ring a bell after a couple of minutes with each finger. When you are doing this at home or in a meeting, or on the metro or in a restaurant, you take as much time as you need.

Let's take a deep breath, and begin:

*God we step into the waters of transformation today, preparing for the peace you have in mind for us. We don't know exactly what that will look like, but we are trusting you to bring about changes.*

*We hold our thumb in anticipation of peace around grief.*

*We hold our pointer finger in anticipation of peace around fear*

*We hold our middle finger in anticipation of peace around anger*

*We hold our ring finger in anticipation of peace around worry*

*We hold our little finger in anticipation of peace around insecurity.*

*Thank you God for hold us, for transforming us, for sending us someone to teach us how to prepare for your coming. We pray in your peace, through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

We can step into these waters of transformation whenever we want, whenever we are ready. We can pray for ourselves or send the peace off to someone else who needs the gift of God's spirit. We can act as surrogates and allow God to hold another person with our hands. God works out the details.

In this coming week I invite you to practice Jin Shin Jyutsu. Put your hand in the hand of the One who desires peace for your life, and the lives of all people.

Put your hand in the hand of the One whose sandals we are not worthy to untie, but who loves us anyways.

Amen.

*Note: In some traditions of Jin Shin Jyatsu the thumb represents worry and the pointer finger represents grief. You are welcome to experiment with both.*