

The Significance of Touch
2 Timothy 1: 1-10
Hampton Baptist Church - Deacon Ordination
January 8, 2012 ~ Rev. Chris Kurtz

Of all the ways we can use our hands, none is more authentically human than touching. Touching, not grasping, the primates and other animals can do that too. Touching, not hitting, that is an act against humanity. Touching, not taking, that is an act of selfish aggression. We are most human when we touch gently, carefully, gracefully. Of all the ways we can use our hands, none is more authentically human and none closer to the intent of God than touching.

When our hands reach out to touch others, we do so because we want to share something, and find that it cannot be shared fully in words. When we were back in Kentucky for Christmas I got to see my son for the first time since July. While I had talked to him many times on the phone and told him that I love him it was much more significant and meaningful when I said it while we were hugging, while we were touching. There is in our human touch so much power.

And so when Paul speaks to the young Timothy and reminds him of the gifts he has received, he urges him to rekindle those gifts, affirmed in him by the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands, which we will do to you our deacon candidates in a few minutes, is an ancient ceremony of blessing; it is a means of setting apart those who are called to spiritual leadership. But it is much more than that. The laying on of hands is not a magic ceremony that transmits authority to those receiving it. Nor is the laying on of hands like a secret handshake that initiates someone into the inner court or privileged circles of the church. The laying on of hands, going back as far as Isaac blessing his son Jacob, is a sign of the gifts that the community of faith recognizes in those chosen for ministry and leadership. In a few moments we will lay hands on those who are being ordained; and in our touch we affirm in them important gifts. Not privileges or authority but the honor and responsibility of ministry and leadership.

Paul is quite specific about these gifts. The apostle is clear what these gifts do not mean. "God did not give us a spirit of timidity," he says. It is not the gift of God if in timidity you refuse to step forward and serve as the Spirit calls. It is not the gift of God if you are so bound up with tradition that you cannot envision a new day for the church. But nor is it the gift of God if you are so bent on change you want to tear down everything accomplished in the past. God does not give us hands to tear away at the fabric of the church, nor hands to push the church toward a reckless future. God has not given you the spirit of timidity.

This morning I want to talk about two vital gifts or blessing we will affirm in you when we lay hands on you. **I. First, through the laying on of hands we affirm God's spirit of power at work in you.** A spirit of power; not of force, not of constraint, but a spirit of authentic leadership. God has placed within you a spirit that will help you lead, serve and minister in our church with encouraging power.

I remember when I sang my first solo in church. It was a one line solo in the middle of a song the youth choir was singing as a part of a musical. I had been practicing for over a month and when I agreed to do it I was very confident. However the closer and closer we got to the night of the musical the more and more nervous I became. Finally two days before I was to sing I was so nervous I made myself sick. I asked, no I begged my mom and dad to call the minister of music and tell him that I was too sick and was not going to be able to sing. They kept saying, "No Chris let's wait to see how you feel on Sunday morning." They knew how

frightened I was. The musical was Sunday evening and on Sunday morning I didn't go to church because I was too sick. That morning my Dad came into my room and said, "I know you're scared bud, but your mom and I will be there and you can look right at us when you sing." He put his hand on my knee and gave it a gentle squeeze (which was a huge show of affection for my Dad at the time) and said, "You can do this, you need to do this. Go out there and do the very best you can and everything will be okay." I knew from that gentle touch that my Dad was right and everything was okay. The power of that gentle touch from my dad made all the difference to me that day.

God did not give you a spirit of timidity, but of power. As deacons you will need to offer gentle, caring, loving and encouraging nudges to the church to do the right thing, what is necessary and in the best interest of God's Kingdom. At times doing what is in the best interest of God's Kingdom will be easy to discern and accomplish, but other times it will require facing hard facts and making tough decisions. Remember you have been called to this ministry and if you keep your eyes and hearts focused on God, just like I kept my eyes focused on my parents during that solo, everything will be okay. You have not been given the spirit of timidity, but of power.

II. Secondly, we affirm in you through the laying on of hands the spirit of love.

God did not give us the spirit of timidity, but the spirit of love. If there is anything that the church needs in these days, it is people with the strength to love. I'm not talking about a warm fuzzy feeling; no the love I am talking about is a love that is self-giving, it is self-sacrificing, it is spending our spiritual capital so that others may be strengthened. The task of a deacon, the task of every Christian, the task of the church, is to love. Love heals. Love strengthens. Love builds up. Love is the right touch at the right time.

While I served Red House Baptist Church our senior pastor was called to another church and we went 11 months with an interim pastor. At that time I was the only other staff at the church and was responsible for all pastoral care. So I went as quickly as I got word that Ruth was back in the hospital again, fourth time in 2 months. Ruth was 92 years old and the oldest member of our church and I remember thinking her body just can't take this much longer.

When I went in to her hospital room I walked up to her bed and she appeared to be asleep. I could tell from her labored breathing that she was struggling and from the equipment she was connected to it was apparent that her body was failing her. I didn't want to disturb her so I decided to leave but before I could her eyes fluttered open and her hand came out from under the sheet and stretched out to me and I took hold of it.

The first time I ever visited Ruth she asked me to bring my Bible, she wanted to share her favorite verses with me. I took it with me every time after that. So there I stood for five minutes, ten minutes, twenty, I really can't remember how long reading her favorite verses to her, praying, speaking to her a little. Whether she understood me I couldn't tell, but she held on tight. You would be amazed how much strength there is in ninety-two year old fingers.

Ruth died that night holding my hand feeling the touch of someone that loved her. What would it have been like for Ruth if for some reason I had not taken her hand, or had wriggled loose too soon, or had preferred to do the preacher's thing and talk, talk, talk ó if our hands had not touched, would she have gone into eternity afraid with the feeling of being alone? I don't know; but I do know that God has given us the spirit of love.

As a deacon you will be called on to give the touch of love at the right time. I don't know how, when, where or why that will happen but when it does don't be timid. Offer your touch honestly and humbly and you will be amazed what God will accomplish in that other person and in you. Being a deacon is so much more than a monthly meeting, making decisions, passing out bulletins and serving communion. Being a deacon requires the vulnerability to allow God to touch your heart and then offering yourself to touch other lives in love. You have not been given the spirit of timidity, but a spirit of love.

III. The spirit of power, the spirit of love, and one more gift, one more blessing. God has given the spirit of self-discipline.

God has not given you the spirit of timidity, but the spirit of self-discipline. You will learn new things as a deacon. You will feel the pulse of this church, you will hear and sense the needs of this community of faith, and you will learn to do whatever it takes to be effective, to do the right thing for the right reason. But to do that you must discipline yourself to have a God perspective.

A man read an ad in the newspaper, "Hunting dog for sale, \$2,500.00, but well worth it." He called the number and the man told him that he had to see the dog in action. The next morning they met and went hunting early. The dog flushed two birds from a clump of bushes and when they fell into the water, he walked on top of the water, grabbed the birds, and walked back on top of the water. The man was amazed, and bought the dog on the spot. The next day he persuaded his brother to go hunting with him. They flushed a couple of birds and the dog again walked on top of the water, retrieved the birds, and walked back to their boat on top of the water.

He asked his brother what he thought of the dog and the brother replied, "So, you bought a dog that can't swim."

Perspective is important and may be the most difficult of the three gifts or blessings to cultivate. Setting aside personal bias and preconceived ideas, notions and thoughts to view opportunities and challenges in new and different ways. It has been said that when there are two Baptists in a room there will be three opinions on any subject. In my almost 4 years here at Hampton Baptist I recognize that decisions are made by listening to the various points of view and building a consensus.

As a deacon your voice, opinion and perspective will be important and you will be challenged to think in new ways you may have never considered. But the goal is to build a consensus with a God perspective not a personal perspective.

God did not give you the spirit of timidity, but the spirit of self-discipline. As we lay hands on you, we affirm the gift of growing and becoming useful and effective in the things of the Kingdom of God.

So I charge you deacon candidates rekindle and embrace these gifts, gifts already in you but now called forth from you to faithfully serve the family of God here at Hampton Baptist Church. For God did not give you the spirit of timidity; but God has given you the spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.

Amen

I would like to invite the candidates to come sit in the chair at the front. In each chair is a HBC monogrammed towel, a symbol to remind you that being a deacon is a servant role within the church. You are called to serve the body of Christ and Hampton Baptist.

If you are ordained or not and would like to come and offer words of affirmation and blessing to these being ordained please come from the piano side. As you offer your affirmation or blessing please tell them your name.