

“The Laying on of Hands”
Hebrews 6:1 – 3; Luke 4:40; 1 Timothy 1:7

Who here are the list people here this morning?

At the start of every day or maybe every week, you have your list of tasks to be done?

Who here when you head off to the supermarket you have your list of items in your hand?

Anyone here on the other extreme, you know, “It’s all up in my head”?

The type of people who wonder why you come home from the supermarket with 12 items you didn’t need and six that you missed.

There are two types of people: those who make lists and those who really should make lists.

The Bible contains a number of lists - have you ever noticed that?

For example, the genealogies, these great long lists of names.

Exodus chapter 20 which contains a list of God’s top ten which are... the Ten Commandments.

In Matthew chapter 5 we find Jesus list his top 9... also known as the Beatitudes.

And this morning’s reading had a list, didn’t it - did you notice the list?

- Repentance from dead works
- Faith in God
- Instruction about baptisms
- The laying on of hands
- The resurrection of the dead
- Eternal judgment

These are called the elementary teachings or doctrines about Jesus.

They are foundational in what it means to follow Christ.

They are the basics.

“The thing is, when you look at a list like this, have you heard a sermon on all them? Is there an odd one out?”

Tell the person next to you.

Did anyone pick the laying on of hands?

The act of a persons or people placing their hand or hands on another and pray for that person.

It makes sense that repentance and faith and all the others are there.

What is surprising is that it features as one of the essential or fundamental teachings of the Christian faith. It must be significant to be on this list.

So my question is, when was the last time you heard teaching or a message specifically on this area?

Would it be fair to say that although it’s listed as being primary or fundamental, the laying of hands has not featured specifically that often in sermons?

So what’s it all about?

“What do you think the laying on of hands is all about?”

We’re going to look at a number of passages this morning.

I think it’s good to go broad and wide on a topic like this one, one that isn’t addressed often, if at all.

So the laying of hands finds its beginnings in the Old Testament.

This was a Jewish rite, understood as signifying the bestowal of blessing and of power from above.

When we reach the New Testament it appears in a number of ways.

For one, it is an act of

Commissioning and Affirmation.

In the Old Testament the people laid their hands on the priests to officially commission them as their representatives before God.

Later on God instructs Moses to lay his hands on Joshua to commission him formally as the new leader of the nation.

This is carried over into the New Testament.

For example we find the account in Acts chapter 6 where a dispute had arisen about the distribution of food for widows. The Greek speaking widows complained that they were being overlooked and more was being given to the Hebrew speaking widows.

So the apostles, the leaders of the church, come up with a solution.

Acts 6:1 - 6:

“Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.

This proposal pleased the whole group.

They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

They presented them to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.”

You see this again happening in Acts 13:2 and 3:

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

We do this here when we ordain elders.

We I was ordained here as a minister other ministers laid their hands on me and prayed.

We often do it when we send overseas missionaries.

In the act of laying on of hands, those being ordained or commissioned are being affirmed in their calling.

We are saying, “We recognise the task or call that has been placed on your life by God. We affirm this call. We release you and we are with you.”

The danger is that this act can be reduced to a mere ritual or ceremony - a going through the motions, and sadly in some churches it is.

What we have to also recognise - and we see this in these passages - is the Holy Spirit is present.

What also happens in this act of the laying on of hands is the Holy Spirit will give them a special measure of grace or authority or power (or all three) for the task or call ahead.

He chooses to do this *through* the people praying.

The vertical and the horizontal come together.

That actually brings in another aspect of the laying on of hands and that's:

Impartation

To impart something is to pass on or transmit.

In the book of Acts there are a number of times when the Holy Spirit is given through the laying on of hands.

Just a bit of background on the passage we're going to read.

The Samaritans have responded to the Good News of King Jesus.

However there was longstanding hostility between Jews and the Samaritans.

This longstanding enmity may have continued if the Holy Spirit was poured out on them as a separate event.

So John and Peter go to these new believers to say that this division has come to an end.

We pick it up in Acts 8:15 - 17:

"When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

So it was affirmation that they were now one in Christ and it was impartation of the Holy Spirit.

And sometimes we need others to lay hands on us and pray for us that we may be filled afresh with the Holy Spirit.

Then there is Timothy. At some Paul had prayed and laid his hands on him.

2 Timothy 1:6:

“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you *through the laying on of my hands*. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of love and a sound mind.”

Through Paul, in the laying on of hands, Timothy receives some kind of spiritual gift that he needs to put into use.¹

For me it was speaking tongues as someone laid hands on me and prayed for me.

It could all kinds of other spiritual gifts that are transmitted through another to us.

So there is commissioning and affirmation, the impartation and then there is **Healing**.

Jesus often healed the sick by laying His hands on them.²

We read Luke chapter 4 verse 40:

“At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and *laying his hands on each one*, he healed them.”

This extended others like the Apostle Paul:

“There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days.

His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery.

Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him.”³

This ministry has been given to His Church.

What we might call miraculous healing, is still for today.

¹ This was not the only time when hands were laid on Timothy: “Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.” 1 Timothy 4:14

² See for example Luke 13:13 and Mark 6:5.

³ Acts 28:7 - 8

Mark's longer ending states that the believers "shall lay their hands on the sick and they shall recover."⁴

It has never been rescinded and the laying on of hands is one vehicle for that.

Jesus is able to heal through us.

And that extends to our inner world as much as our physical bodies.

We all carry hurts and longings and disappointments.

Sometimes the laying on of hands is about healing our hearts and souls.

There is a warning that is cited when speaking about the laying on of hands and it's this:

1 Timothy 5:22:

"Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure."

"What do you do with this verse?"

I think that some people over spiritualise this verse.

It's like, "If you're not careful, you'll catch something! If you lay hands on the wrong person you'll get some kind of spiritual Covid!"

In the context it's about leadership.

Paul is warning not to lay hands on a person for a leadership role to prematurely and subsequently it turns out that a person was not ready or qualified.

The laying on of hands is reference to ordination – the public recognition of a person's call to ministry.

Time needs to be taken in appointing leaders.

Much hurt and pain can be avoided if time is taken in appointing leaders to their roles in the church.

When I think about my own experience of being ordained as minister I think that Presbyterian Church has fairly robust system.

⁴ Mark 16:18

For those unfamiliar, in all it takes 5 years from the time a candidate is accepted into training until they become ordained.
It included being interviewed at a local level.
After which I had to obtain a medical certificate and undergo psychological testing – I passed with a C+😊. But it is amazing the insight and accuracy that these tests have
It also includes a completing a 3 year theological degree.

It's time that reveals to hidden traits of a person – the flaws that we all have and the strengths that each person possesses.

The most likely of candidates, charismatic and winsome, may have flaws that disqualify them immediately.
On the other hand, there are those quietly at work in the background, who draw little attention to themselves, whom the church should take more notice of.

So what did you think about all that?

So my take-aways from this are two simple reminders.

The first is: be encouraged, the Lord wants to partner with you and work through you... and you... and you.
I mean, we have a God who invites us to come alongside and take part in what He is doing in the world.
That goes for the whole of life and not just for the laying on of hands.
The other point is this: the act of the laying on of hands is belongs to all believers.

As we saw, it is one of the fundamental or basic doctrines for everyone who is a follower of Jesus.

When it comes to impartation and healing through the laying on of hands, that's us, for you and me.

Jesus has given it to His whole Body.

It's not just for the Presbycostals and it's not just for the ordained or priests or bishops.

It belongs to us all.

It should be a regularly part of what we do.

Jesus I think wants to restore this forgotten area to this church.

So to finish, when was the last time you laid your hands of somebody and prayed for them?

For some of us it's a common feature.

I would also hazard a guess that for some of us here the answer is "Never".

Let's do this.

In our home groups and after our Sunday mornings and in whatever place where an openness is present.