

One of the odd things about this morning's resurrection story from Luke's Gospel is the way in which Jesus identifies himself to his friends: 'Look at my hands and my feet,' he says to the startled and terrified disciples.

They are shaking in their sandals. They are wondering whether they're having a group hallucination, when Jesus offers them four proofs that he is who they think he might be: two hands and two feet, that's ten fingers and ten toes, comprising hands and feet which could belong to no-one else but him.

It is his wounds that Jesus wants them to see. But isn't this a strange way to identify himself? Why not simply say, 'Look at my face?' or 'Listen to my voice?'

Could you identify someone by their hands and feet alone? Could you imagine wanted posters with hands and feet on them instead of mugshots? 'Suspect is pigeon-toed with broken little toe on right foot. Hands are square, with bitten fingernails. Small scar on left thumb.'

Hands and feet are not the first thing we notice about one another, yet they are so telling of who we are. Hands may have freckles, tiny scars, bitten nails, or swollen joints...

Feet are somehow more private: we tend to keep them covered by shoes in public. Maybe, if we all wore sandals and washed one another's feet as our ancestors did, then we would know them better.

We know a lot more about each other by our hands. What I like about hands is that they do not lie. We can usually control our faces but our hands give us away every time: nervous hands, clenched hands, damp hands, dirty hands...

Maybe now that we are all wearing masks, we should concentrate on looking at each other's hands and, when they are visible, feet!

I love reading and watching detective stories. Sherlock Holmes is amazing: after some unsuspecting soul has been introduced to him, spending just a few moments in his presence before leaving the room, the great detective turns to his faithful companion Dr Watson and tells him what the visitor does for a living, their family status, income level, hobbies – all based on having shaken a hand.

'Look at my hands and my feet', Jesus said. And when they did, his disciples saw everything that he had ever been to them: they saw the hands which had broken bread and blessed broiled fish, offering it to them again and again. They saw the hands which had pressed pads of mud against a blind man's eyes, and taken a dead girl by the hand so that she rose and walked again. They saw the hands which danced through the air when he taught, the same hands which reached out to touch and cleanse a leper without hesitating or holding back.

And Jesus' feet – the ones which had carried him hundreds of miles, taking his good news to all who were starving for it. The disciples saw the feet which had carried Jesus into the homes of criminals and corrupt bureaucrats, whom he treated like long-lost relatives. They saw the feet which had been washed with a woman's tears and dried with her hair.

They were wounded now – all of them – the hands which had reached out to other people and the feet which had walked upon the earth. They had holes in them, sore angry-looking bruises which the disciples found painful even to look at.

But it was important for the disciples to look at them, because they had not done so before. Earlier, when they had worked out what was going to happen to those beloved hands and feet, they had fled, hiding themselves away where they could not see the bleeding, or hear the hammering of the nails.

‘Look’, Jesus said to them, when the danger was past. ‘You can look at my hands and my feet now.’

Jesus wanted his friends to know that he had gone through the danger and not around it, so he told them to look, not at his face, not into his eyes, but at his hands and his feet, which bore the marks of what had happened to him; his hands and his feet, which told the truth, which were the only proof he had, that he was who he said he was.

We might wish that Jesus had come back restored to full health, but he didn’t.

Jesus left us something to recognize him by – his hands and his feet – just like ours, or almost like ours.

We know what Jesus’ hands and feet said about him. So,

What do our hands and feet say about us?

Where have they been?

Whom have they touched?

How have they served?

What have they proclaimed?

What do our hands and feet say about us?

‘You are witnesses of these things,’ Jesus told those who saw his hands and his feet, before he entrusted the world to their care.

When the world looks around for the risen Christ, when people want to know what that means, they look at Christians. Not at our pretty faces, not at our sincere eyes, but at our hands and our feet – what we have done with them and where we have gone with them.

We are witnesses of these things today. As we declare during the Eucharist week after week, we are the body of Christ.

You may recognise this prayer by St Teresa of Avila:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Amen.