

## **It's the Hands**

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher

Sunday January 17, 2021

Acts 6:1–6; I Timothy 1:3–7

Today we ordain and install elders and deacons and like so many other things in this past year, we are doing it in a new way. This act of ordaining has been happening since Biblical times, but we can't rely on the traditional way our elders and deacons come forward and answer the constitutional questions and then all who have been ordained in the past would come forward and lay hands on them. Because we CAN'T do it in that way, it makes us think why do we do it and what does "laying on of hands" actually mean? Today, I have asked Eugene, Kathy and Mary to think back to their own ordination and what it meant when elders, deacons and clergy came forward and gathered around them and laid their hands on their heads and shoulders. What does it mean to be selected by the voice of the church to serve in a particular way? We ask these folks to do special jobs in the church in order to help us be Christ's witness to the world.

I was ordained to the World and Sacrament on Father's Day in 1982; you can do the math. As I approached that day of ordination, I didn't think it was such a big deal. Finishing Seminary with as little sleep as humanly possible in order to get all the requirements done, that was a big deal. Marching into Princeton University Chapel and its gothic magnificence for graduation, realizing that I would never have to write a term paper every again, now that was memorable. Jumping through all the hoops that the Presbytery required and securing a job as an Assistant Pastor, now that was huge. But, the ordination service itself, now that

wasn't something I thought much about. It was sort of icing on the very substantial cake.

Between graduating and getting ready to move 600 miles from my home to Springfield, Ill., I had fit in this Ordination Service. It was one more thing to do. So, I was surprised that a couple from the church where I served as a student pastor on Sunday mornings chose to drive the six hours across Pennsylvania in order to attend. I was surprised that my sister and her husband, and all their kids loaded up in their van from Ohio to come. All I had to do is stand there answer the questions that we asked our elders and deacons, kneel at the proper time and give the benediction. No sweat.

Although I did not appreciate it at the time, that act of ordination was something that I had to grow into. The first inkling that this was big was when I noticed the hands above me as I kneeled down.

The hands that were placed on my head and my shoulder were hands of those who I had known since birth. As a child, where I was baptized and confirmed as a teenager, I had rolled under the pews in the darkened sanctuary when we were not supposed to be in there. There were the hands of John, the eternal kid, who led my Youth Group, the small but capable hands of Leah, my mother's closest friend, and the first woman elder in that church, were placed on me. She was the woman I most wanted to be like. There were the hands of Bob, whose surrogate grandfather took us kids to church camp each Sunday to play volleyball with a church group and who let me play with the adults even when I was not very good and the strong hands of an engineer with Bethlehem Steel, were there.

There were hands of my family, my father who I was following in ministry. My mother who was there in her own right as an elder and not because she was the pastor's wife. My sister, as a new schoolteacher,

was serving as a deacon, along with my sister who was organizing a new church. Then there were the hands I felt that were not present, the hands of my grandfather who was 100 and told me I should go to Seminary before it was even an idea in my head. I was 17 at the time. The hands of my mother's father who grew up Methodist but became Presbyterian upon marrying my grandmother and was so proud that he was a deacon. I remember as a child saying, "You mean you were once a deacon." he looked me in the eye and said with a conviction that implanted in my memory, "Once a deacon you are always a deacon." The indelible act manifested by hands. Frail fallible human hands sharing what God's love and support with each other. That is church, that is why we are here today.

After all those hands lifted, I hadn't grown or become lighter. It was still just a 25-year-old who did not have a clue of what it was like to be a minister. No power surged through me; I did not suddenly have all the correct answers. That ancient act showed me I did not need to have all the answers. That I was not alone in this endeavor of ministry. Believe me, there were plenty of mistakes along the way.

As I continue to grow into my ordination, the things I thought were big deals really weren't, and the thing that truly stays with me is that Sunday evening, Father's Day, at the church where I was known as Dr. Fisher's daughter. What makes the difference is the countless hands along the way.

Take a look at your own hands. They are hands that have shown strength, hands that have been joined with others, hands that have held back or hands that have encouraged and brought others closer. Think of the smaller hands that have been encompassed into your own that you have led. What we are doing today is celebrating all the hands, young and old, strong and weak, along our journey as Christians.

We cannot do what others have done for us through the century to physically lay hands on our new elders and deacons, but know of all the countless hands that will be there for you in the church and in your life. Thanks be to God.