

# Vicar's Sermon

**Date :** Sun 22/03/2009.  
**Title :** God's loving touch and hold.  
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**Subject :** How God holds us and comforts us.

Now, I'm going to start by giving you a test question: what is the third line of the marriage vows? Answer: To Have and to Hold. And today, on this Mothering Sunday, I want us to think about this very important verb: to Hold. Remember those words from Psalm 131 "As a child lies quietly in its mother's arms so is my soul quiet within me."

You know, it happens at Baptisms time and time again: there's the baby, quite happy and content, sometimes even smiling at everyone, thoroughly enjoying the occasion and all the attention. And then, suddenly, the poor little thing is handed over to the Vicar who then tries to drown it in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit! The inevitable, of course, invariably happens and the child begins to scream and what began as a very pleasant day suddenly becomes a nightmare. The Vicar then tries his best to cheer the child up by becoming a child himself but all to no avail. The mother by this time is usually looking anxious herself until the moment comes when the cruel Vicar decides to hand the baby back to its mother **and then, usually immediately, we witness a miracle for which everyone is truly thankful! An absolute hush descends on the proceedings and both the baby and the mother are pacified.** This particular Vicar then announces that we shall sing two verses of "Silence is Golden!"

The truth is that the Vicar's arms, however caring and well intentioned, were not the arms that were either familiar or wanted. The baby instantly knows the touch and feel of its mother and in that knowledge it gains peace, security and love. A mother's touch and hold is the touch and hold of love.

All of us, without exception, need to be held and not only when we're babies but throughout our lives. From the moment of our conception and growth in our mother's womb we are held securely and cocooned. At the instant of our birth we are held and then if at all possible given over to our mother. The mother's first desire is to see, touch and hold her baby. And this is something that we don't grow out of nor should we because we were created in this way. When we get married we promise to have and to hold our partner. We need each other's touch and to reach out to another person is as natural as breathing. And at certain times you're acutely aware of this when, for example, you're in the company of a blind person or when someone is upset or sorrowful your first reaction is to reassure them by touch. A child falls over: what do you do? Stand several feet away and say how sorry you are or go and hug them? I know that some people dislike sharing the peace in church and find it embarrassing but there are many others for whom it's one of the highlights of their week such as the old lady who said to me "it's the only time nowadays that I have any physical contact with anyone."

It is a basic need and not one that society can prevent or legislate against on health or safety grounds. It is not improper to want to be held or to hold another person and Mothering Sunday is a most appropriate time to be reminded of this. **And what is true physically is equally true spiritually.**

St. Paul wrote that "the love of God has been poured into our hearts whereby we call You, Abba, or Father." And I realise it's not Father's Day today but, in my view, you could equally substitute the word Father for Mother because what this means is that we have a loving parent/child relationship with God.

God created us, He made us, and He loves us as His child. And just like an earthly parent He has to let us go out into the world and experience our own lives with all of its joys and sorrows. He cannot prevent injury, hurt or even tragedy no more than we can with our own children and He feels the pain of His children just like we do. **But He can hold us and He does hold us no-**

**matter what we're going through.** When my mum was alive I know that when I was going through difficult times she was right there with me even though she was 230 miles away.

And I know that with God also because He holds me and comforts me in the palm of His hand. The Psalmist knew that when he described the whole of Israel as lying still and quiet in God's arms.

There is a great peace from knowing that you're precious and are held securely by God. I like this photograph I took of a big hand with the child curled up in its palm. It reminds me that each of us are in the centre of God's heart and are held in the palm of His hand and there is no more peaceful, secure and beautiful place to be. You know, it's wonderful how mothers are made to measure in relationship with their children. You never get a mother whose arms are too long or short or crooked to give her child a hug and God's hand is always made to measure as far as you and I are concerned. There will always be space in His heart and room in His hand for you no matter who or what you are.

And I'm not pretending that it's easy and that there aren't many times in our lives when we feel alone and lonely or even abandoned. And just like I sometimes say to those who are bereaved "there's no substitute for a physical hug and an arm round your shoulder that you can feel and touch." I'm not pretending that it's easy or even totally adequate but it is worth reminding ourselves that ultimately we're not alone and that there are those hands that reach out for us and those arms that do embrace us and that, one day, will ever hold us fast.

Amen.

*Peter*

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