

# Sermon

## 'Hands and feet of Jesus'

Year C, 2022, Epiphany 7, Luke 6.27-38<sup>1</sup>, Sermon by Stephanie Gotze



Have you ever looked at someone and thought to yourself, “Why do they have something that I don’t?” Or maybe you have gotten into some kind of a disagreement with another person, and begun to treat them differently? Perhaps you have felt that deep frustration toward someone who has wronged you, and have desired to retaliate?

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 6.27-38. “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

In my role as a school counsellor in a high school I hear a great number of these stories. Many are as simple and as trivial as “she looked at me wrong,” and others are enduring conflicts that have lasted months and years. Sometimes I hear one side of a conflict aired in my office after recess, and another after lunch.

We see two patterns of behaviour towards others warned against in our readings this morning. These are retaliation, in the words of Jesus, and envy, in our Psalm. Daily we have many opportunities for envy and for retaliation, and daily, we have opportunities to trust God, and to respond in love.

The psalmist shows us that that envy is about faith. It shows us that when we look upon someone else with resentment, it is revealing our own discontent and peace. The psalmist also shows us the opposite of envy; and what we can do instead. Let us embrace these things we can put in place of envy. “Trust” “delight” and “commit”. There is great reward that comes from trusting in God. “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” What a great promise we have. The desires of our heart, that we see others having, are not brought about in our lives by envying the other person, but rather, by delighting in the Lord. What freedom and harmony that brings. We are so filled by these marvellous promises that we can let go of the resentment that bubbles up into envy.

So when envy rises up in us tomorrow, or perhaps even later today, let us suppose we remember these words, “do not be envious.” What can we do then? We can rest in these promises, asking God to open our eyes to how glorious they are, and ask for God’s help for us to believe it and act it out, as is our calling. This is delighting in the Lord.

We are standing on the firm foundation of our status as God’s children when we delight in the Lord. God loves us, and so we are free. We can delight, which is to be profoundly happy and content, in all that God is in himself and has done for us. This becomes so great it consumes our envy and our desire for retaliation, and conforms our heart to God’s. But this can only be brought about by looking to the forgiveness, acceptance and adoption proceeding from the cross.

Jesus Christ came, lived, died, rose, and ascended into heaven, which ultimately satisfies every spiritual need of those of us who are believers in his name, and radically reconciles individuals to God. This influences every aspect of our lives, including the way we treat our adversaries. It is not out of our own sense of need, but out of our own fullness with the satisfying mercy of God. Our impulse to

retaliation and revenge, just like our impulse to envy, is dissolved by knowing that this world is not our ultimate home, and that Christ is ours, and we belong to Christ.

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” Jesus tells his disciples then and his disciples now that we are children of God. God is our Father, and we are his children, who reflect his character and nature. Showing mercy shows who we are as God’s own children. We are showing that who we are by our adoption as God’s own forever is the basis for who we are becoming in action. “Love your enemies, and you will be sons of the Most High.” As we love our enemies, we become more like who we already are. If we do not love our enemies, we do not act out our calling, our adoption, our status as God’s children. But love does not make us children of God, love the way we act when we are born of God.

To love is to stop comparing our lives to others with envy, and to show mercy to those who hate and hurt. What an unbelievable privilege it is to be Christ’s own, and what becomes of others in their possessions or actions grows ‘strangely dim’. And so envy and retaliation fade away.

In every instance of loving our enemy, and of refraining from envy in favour of trust in the Lord, God is shown to be for us who he is, rich in mercy and abounding in love. The privilege and the power to show mercy and delight in the Lord tells the watching world that we are those who have been satisfied by God’s mercy towards us. Showing mercy glorifies God by leading us to praise him for his mercy and encourages the same in others.