
Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ

Hands of Commitment
What MUST I Do?

A Sermon by

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Scripture: Luke 13:31-35

I want to begin with a word of thanks to our guests from Web University: Andy Lang, Rod Mundy, Greg Brekke, Tiffany French, from our National staff of the United Church of Christ, based in Cleveland, Cleveland rocks, as well as the others who led workshops this weekend on how communications, especially electronic, web, digital resources, are out there and how we in the church can get the word out, let others know who we are and what we are about, get rid of this 'we are the best kept secret church, and if people only knew there was a church like this out there'. These good folks are our OCWM, Our Church's Wider Mission, at work. Their job, their mission and purpose is to strengthen local churches to do, to fulfill, our mission: to form Christian disciples, disciples who serve and love and commit and work toward transformation, creating that realm of justice on earth as it is in heaven. So, thank you friends, and yes, February is always a good time to come to Phoenix from Ohio.

As we were learning all these electronic, high tech resources, I was reminded of a quote from the Gospel according to Winnie the Pooh: "You can't always sit in your corner of the forest and wait for people to come to you...you have to go to them sometimes."

We follow a Jesus who went out to the people. These 40 days of Lent, now 30 days, but who is counting, we are reflecting, thinking, plotting about our hands, seeking hands and committed hands, hands that are active in our faith: doing, caring, welcoming, generous hands. The Jesus we follow this Lent touched lovingly and with healing, with his hands.

The Gospel of Luke today tells us about hands in at least three ways. First, the Pharisee who comes with a whispered message, "Get away from here because Herod wants to kill you". Secondly, "You tell that fox..." and, thirdly, "A hen gathers her brood under her wings", open hands.

First, the Pharisee. Pharisees were not all bad guys. They were all guys, but they were one party within Judaism which paid special attention to the 'politics of holiness' to the 'purity of the Jewish faith'. The Pharisees were the teachers of the law, and they took the law out from the Temple, into the streets, if you will, helping people to understand it was not just the priesthood, set apart, who fulfilled the law, but all the people, making all the things that Jewish people did in the secular lives 'sacred'. A priesthood of all believers, sound familiar to us?, not just an educated and ordained clergy, but the work of the whole people. Some scholars maintain that Jesus was a Pharisee who took his understanding of Torah, the laws, and redefined it even further in terms of justice and compassion.¹ One caring, like-minded brother Pharisee comes to Jesus and whispers to him, "Watch your back. Herod is after you. You may be non-violent and all about peace and love, but Herod will get you. I am scared for you Jesus."

In this case, whispering a warning is a good thing. Brother Pharisee says all he has to say to Jesus. If he could have, he might have sent him an e mail, or a text.

Secondly, Jesus responds directly to the threat. "Thank you for telling me. I'm not stupid. I can see my enemies, Herod Antipas, and, yes, he has bigger armies than I do, but not even all the armies of the Roman Empire can stop what God is about through me, through love, through compassion, through justice. Love wins. Not hate. Not power over. Not killing.

¹ levellers.wordpress.com/2007/04/01/

There comes a time when we all, like Jesus, have to call out and name the bully, the conniver and the cheat, and say, “Stop. Stop that behavior. We don’t treat one another like that here. We don’t talk about one another like that here. We can disagree, sure. But there may come a time when you may have to find a new community because that behavior is not welcome here.”

Thirdly, Jesus said, “I am like a hen who gathers her brood under her wings.” All you urban gardeners, all you with urban and rural chicken farms, “If you have ever loved someone you could not protect, then you understand the depth of Jesus’ lament. All you can do is open your arms. You cannot make anyone walk into them. And this, wings spread wide open, is the most vulnerable position in the world. But if you mean what you say, then this is how you stand.”² So what MUST we do? Whisper warnings. Call out abuse, negativity, and evil. Open our arms. Be vulnerable—wide open.

What if, for the next 30 days of Lent, we stood with arms wide open? What would we be committing to if we were to be like this? Jesus could have chosen any number of animal images: I am God, lion of Judah, king of the jungle, a mighty eagle, a leopard, or a sly fox for himself. Instead, he said, “Like a mother hen, protecting my brood.” Arms wide open, Jesus commits his Spirit, ‘into your hands I commit my Spirit’, and every day Jesus calls us to commit our hands. Amen.

² Barbara Brown Taylor, *As a Hen Gathers Her Brood*, *The Christian Century*, February 25, 1986, page 201.