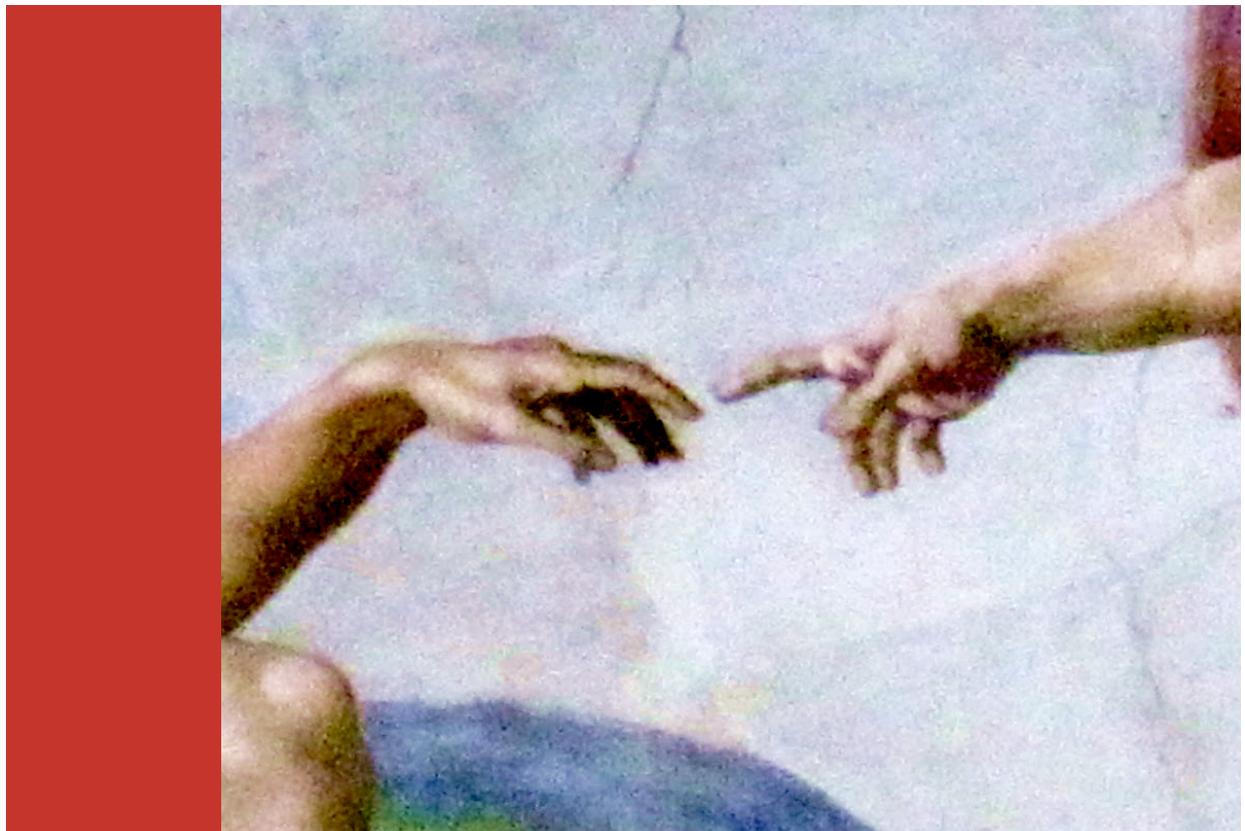


THE HANDS OF JESUS



**6 SERMON OUTLINES FOR
CHURCH SERVICES TO
ACCOMPANY “THE HANDS OF
JESUS” SMALL GROUP
STUDY GUIDE SERIES**
by Peter Corney

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SIX SERMON OUTLINES FOR SUNDAY SERVICES TO GO WITH THE SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE SERIES. “THE HANDS OF JESUS AND OUR HANDS” By Peter Corney

Notes for preachers

Introduction:

1. Aim:

The general aim of this preaching series and the small group/home group studies is to encourage people to think of themselves as extensions of Jesus’ ministry to others – their hands are now the hands of Jesus to the world. (John 17:18, 20:21) The series is very practical and encourages people to think of how they can extend the hand of friendship, love, care and compassion to others as they share the story of Jesus with them.

Rodney Stark in his outstanding book “The Rise of Christianity” describes its remarkably rapid growth in just over 300 hundred years from a tiny minority to the dominant religion in the Roman Empire. By 312 the Emperor Constantine himself had converted to Christianity. Stark convincingly shows that one of the most powerful reasons for this was that the Christians morally and compassionately outlived, out loved, out served, out cared for and out hoped the cynical, brutal, and fatalistic pagan world. Their treatment of woman, slaves, orphans, the sick and those in prison, was in great contrast to the brutal and prejudiced culture of Roman society at the time. People were drawn to the faith that motivated and sustained them and gave them hope in the uncertain world of the first century. Our concern in these studies is to encourage Christians to set the same example today. Starks’ book could be used by preachers as a resource of excellent examples. (Pub. Harper Collins 1997) Two other books that might provide stories that are relevant and powerful are: “Gifted hands” the story of Ben Carson the gifted neurosurgeon, by Carson and Murphey and “Ten fingers for God” the story of Paul Brand by Dorothy Clarke Wilson. Brand was the pioneering hand and restorative surgeon who worked with leprosy patients in India.

Planning:

We suggest you begin the sermon series one or two Sundays before the small groups / home groups begin the series. This helps to promote the program and set the theme for the coming six weeks. Make sure you have enough booklets for all the groups and leaders available at church on the Sunday you launch. People not in groups could be encouraged to follow the series in their own personal study and devotions.

2. Preaching tips:

There are many ways to approach preaching but one of the most effective is the *inductive approach*. This is where you begin where people are, with their life experience, and move from there to the text and unpack its message and its

application to their lives. Inductive preaching is like unwrapping a gift, you begin with the question or issue or problem and gradually unfold the answer rather than announce the answer or conclusion at the beginning and then seek to explain or argue its case.

Everything we know about spoken communication tells us that *a story* is the most effective way to hold peoples attention. Jesus modeled story telling in a powerful way. His stories often include a question that drew the listeners in to the process of finding the answer. (Luke 7:41-42).He also frequently used *metaphor* to great effect – think of the “*I am*” passages; “*I am the bread of life*”, “*I am the gate for the sheep*”. Metaphor is a form of illustration or explanation. Every time we say something “*is like...*” we introduce metaphor. When a radio football commentator says that a player “...crashed through a pack *like* a charging rhino.” we have a word picture using a metaphor that explains the passage of play clearly to us even though we can’t physically see it. But remember metaphors have to be unpacked for most people.

In this series we frequently use story, metaphor and narrative recreation of an event to get the point across. *Narrative recreation* is where we retell a story or incident, describing the scene as if you were actually there when it happened – like Jesus’ resurrection appearance on the beach when the disciples had gone fishing; “*Imagine you were there on the beach that morning when Jesus was cooking breakfast for you. You’re cold and hungry, but before you even get off the boat you can smell the delicious fragrance of fresh fish cooking....*” (John 21:1-14)

3. Application:

In the end the point of preaching and teaching God’s word is to help us be more obedient, loving and effective disciples of Jesus. People need to go away with practical ways to apply in their lives this week what they have heard and read.

5. A sermon structure:

- (a) Title
- (b) Aim
- (c) Bible reading
- (d) Introduction
- (e) Biblical exposition
- (f) A story
- (g) Application

Sermon 1.

Title: “Hands of compassion”

Aim: To see ourselves as the hands of Jesus in the world now.

Bible reading: Mathew 8:1-17

Introduction: Can you remember the last time you injured your hand, cut a finger, hit your finger nail hard with a hammer, broken a bone in your hand or some other injury? Not only did it hurt but you couldn't use your hand properly for some time. If it was in plaster you probably couldn't use it at all for a while. Do you remember how awkward and frustrating it was? When we injure our hands we realize how much we use them, how important they are to us, how much we rely on them for every day tasks.

Would you place your hands in your lap now and look at them. Think for a moment of all the tasks you used them for this morning, - cleaning your teeth, preparing and eating your breakfast, answering you email, making a phone call, driving the car to church..... And when you got here you used them to greet people, to shake hands, to wave, to give a newcomer directions. Our hands are also part of our “language” of communication and expression. We use them to convey a range of emotions and feelings; to show friendship, affection, love, to show praise and enjoyment we clap in appreciation, but also to express anger, to point in accusation, to shake our fist, to make rude signs!

When we read the life of Jesus in the Gospels and his interactions with people one of the interesting things is the way he uses his hands. It is not immediately obvious but when you focus on it it is very striking. With his hands he touches and heals the sick, he washes his disciples dirty feet, he breaks and serves bread for them at the Passover. He takes children in his arms and places his hands on them in blessing, he cooks and serves fish for them on the beach at Lake Galilee and on the cross his hands are cruelly pierced. In our imagination we can easily see him warmly embracing his friends, clasping a shoulder or hand in affection or encouragement, waving a greeting or farewell, emphasizing a point he is making as he teaches, holding out his open hands in prayer to the Father as was the Jewish tradition. They are also tradesman's hands they are used to hard work. Jesus the divine son of God is also fully human and, like us, he used his hands to express himself, to convey feelings, empathy, friendship, encouragement, support and love.

If we turn to our scripture passage for today (Math 8:1-17) we see Jesus reaching out to touch in healing. Now while Jesus does not have to touch to heal he often does, we have examples of both in our reading today. (Read vs 5-13) Here we see the Centurions' servant healed without Jesus' physical touch or even his presence. But in vs 14- 17, in the case of Peter's mother in law, Jesus touches her hand and the fever leaves her. (Read vs 13-17). But it is the healing of the Leper that is most significant here in relation to touch. (Read vs 1-4)

Because of the 1st C misunderstanding of the disease lepers were isolated and excluded from the general community, their families and their friends. They were outcasts. No one touched them for fear of contracting the disease. Jesus' touch may have been the first physical human contact this man had received for years. **(At this point you could create a narrative reconstruction of this event from the perspective of the Leper.)**

“Imagine yourself as the leper in this encounter with Jesus. For years no one has touched you, your family only speak to you from a distance when they bring you food..... “

Application:

As disciples of Jesus we are called to follow him, he is our teacher and guide and model for the way we should live. In one of his conversations before he was to leave the disciples in body he said “As the Father sent me so I send you.” (John 20:21) We are now to be Jesus’ hands in the world, we are called to reach out and touch others in care and compassion. In this series we will focus on the way Jesus used his hands and what they tell us about the way we should live and act towards others.

This week think about someone in your circle of regular contacts; friends, family, people you work with, neighbors who needs the “touch” of a visit, a kind word, a listening ear, a practical offer of help, pray for them and then decide to do something about it.

Remember physical touch may not be appropriate but we can “touch” others with kindness and compassion in many other ways.

Imagine a local church full of people who want to reach out and touch others with compassion and care.

END.

(NB: The following can be used if you feel it is helpful, as some people may raise it as an issue) Perhaps the only example of the use of his hands that we struggle with is when they expressed righteous indignation and judgment when he drove the animals and money changers from the Temple. We who are flawed and fallen are unable to judge others with this kind of authority. We should note the following as we ponder this. Johns account makes clear that the knotted rope was used to drive the sheep and cattle out not to whip the people. The background is that the outer court of Herod’s temple, the court of the Gentiles, had become a virtual Bazaar filled with pilgrims, animals for sale and currency traders. At festivals hundreds of pilgrims gathered there to buy a sacrificial offering. The traders had performed the ultimate act of betrayal and blasphemy in turning the place of prayer and the worship of God into a place for cheating the pilgrims and the poor who came to make their offerings by making them pay inflated exchange rates when they changed their money to pay for their doves and animal sacrifices. Jesus’ quoting of Joel 7 makes this clear, “you have turned this place into a “den of thieves”.

There was also another matter that outraged Jesus. There was no court of the Gentiles in the original temple nor was there a separate court for woman, there was no segregation by race or gender. Both these were later additions as Israel became more exclusive and forgot its mission to the Gentiles. That is why Jesus quotes Isaiah 56. The temple was to be “a house of prayer for all nations.” Their loss of vision for their mission as a servant nation to the world greatly distressed Jesus. Read the whole of Isaiah 56 and Joel 7 for the biblical background if you decide to include this incident. We can conclude that while we who are flawed are unable to judge others with this kind of authority, never the less we should be as passionate about the mission Jesus has given to us to take the whole Gospel to the whole world, and follow his righteous indignation against injustice and exploitation and seek ways to redress it where we can.)

Sermon 2

Title: “Servant hands”

Aim: To encourage people to develop servant hearts and follow the example of Jesus by being servants of others.

Bible readings: John 13: 1-17 and Mark 10: 35-45

Introduction:

Have you ever had your feet washed and massaged? You may have been in hospital and been unable to wash yourself. If you're not ticklish it is a very pleasant experience! The nurses here today will be very familiar with the washing of patient's feet. Sometimes this is not such a pleasant task, especially in Emergency when you have an alcoholic man who has not washed for some time and has been living rough!

In the Middle East in Jesus' time part of the ritual of welcome for visitors to your home was the washing of their feet. The roads were dusty in summer and muddy in winter and people wore sandals so their feet got very dirty when traveling. The job of washing the visitor's feet was given to the servant and often the servant was a slave.

Have you ever been asked to do something you thought was beneath your dignity? Have you ever served in a shop or Café and been treated rudely or as an inferior by a customer? Serving others doesn't always come naturally to most of us, and yet we ourselves like to be served.

Up to the Edwardian era in English society people who were employed in the running of large households were called servants; they were poorly paid and often badly treated. Their status was considered inferior to that of their employers. Today we call them domestic workers or personal assistants because the word servant carries negative connotations from the past.

So when we hear that Jesus' call to discipleship is a call to servant hood it can come as a bit of a shock. It is made more challenging by the fact that in Jesus' time many servants were also slaves. That is why Peter is so shocked by Jesus' actions in John 13.

Read and explain John 13: 1-17

The context is the night of Jesus' betrayal and arrest. He is about to fulfill his statement in Mark 10:42-45 (read) – the greatest act of servant hood – laying down his life for us.

Servant hood usually involves some personal sacrifice, it means putting others first.

The disciples have gathered for a meal, there has been some argument and tension over who is the most important among them. (See Luke 22:24-27) This dispute had arisen before. (See Mark 10: 35 – 45) We need to remember these men were just like us, they struggled with ego and pride and insecurity. During the meal Jesus gets up from the table, removes his outer clothing, takes a towel and a bowl of water and begins to wash their feet. The timing of this during the meal is unusual. Usually people's feet would have been washed as they arrived and removed their sandals at the door. Perhaps there were no servants to do this task and none of the disciples had volunteered. This would fit with the arguing between them about who was the most important that Luke records. Jesus comes to Simon Peter who baulks at Jesus washing his feet. Jesus is his Lord and master; it is he, Simon who should be washing Jesus' feet. (Read John 13: 6-9)

Through the symbol of the foot washing and his interaction with Peter Jesus is teaching them two things: First, that discipleship involves servant hood and practical love towards others (vs15). Second, that it is only through his coming death, the ultimate act of servant hood, (Mk.10:45), that they can be washed, forgiven, and made one with him (vs8). Only

later will Peter and the others fully understand this.(vs7) *(See the note below for a comment on verses 10-11)*

Verse 11 is referring to Judas who was to betray him.

Verses 12 -17 Contains the main idea about servant hood that he is teaching us. But note that Jesus introduces another aspect of Christian servant hood in vs.16 by expanding the metaphor to include the idea of **messengers**. The idea of discipleship involving being messengers of Jesus occurs in other places in the NT, eg: Luke 10:1-16, 2Cor. 5:20. Paul brings both ideas together as he defines his calling in Romans 1:1 “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God”
Surely the greatest act of servant hood is to bring the message of Jesus to someone.

The world is full of people standing on their dignity, their rights, claiming the honor they feel is due to them, offended because they have not received the recognition they feel they deserve or they priority their position deserves. To use Jesus’ image they crave the higher place of honor at the feast.

But:

“There is only one real kind of dignity – the dignity of service.
There is only one worthwhile kind of greatness – the greatness of service
There is only one worthy kind of honor – the honor of service.” (Anon.)

A story: There is a famous drawing by Albrecht Durer “The Praying Hands.” (At this point the image could be projected on a screen, it is freely available on the internet) It is said that the story behind the drawing is an illustration of the power of servant hood. The drawing is by the famous 16th C. German artist and engraver Albrecht Durer. It is said that the hands belong to his brother, also an artist, but who put his artistic career aside to work in manual labor to support his more talented brother in the development of his gift. The drawing is Durer’s tribute to his brother’s sacrificial love and service.

The full significance of his brothers sacrifice is only understood when we realize that Durer’s artistic output and the development of his considerable gift coincided with the Reformation in Europe and the inventing of the printing press. The reformers wanted to put the bible into every ones hands in their own language. When the bible was translated into the ordinary language of the people and mass produced on the new printing presses Durer’s woodcuts and engravings were used to illustrate the text. They were among the first mass produced graphics and pictures. Up till this time the only pictures were paintings on the walls of churches, castles and the homes of the rich nobility. Durer’s brother not only served him but thousand of ordinary people by bringing alive the bible to them in pictorial form. Servant actions are blessed by the Holy Spirit and often have a ripple effect we can not anticipate.

Application:

- Reflect on your involvement in your local church. Are you an active servant of your Christian community?
- How could you serve others more especially in humble ways that have no kudos or high profile.

- Is there a need in your local community that you could become involved in and serve?
- How could you as a messenger of Jesus be more active in serving others by bringing the good news about Jesus to them?
- In your own home how could you serve your family by making life a little easier for them just in little ways?

END

(Note: Verse 10 is not easy to understand. The cultural context is that when you were invited to a meal as a guest you bathed at home beforehand but when you arrived, as we noted before, you still needed to wash your feet. Jesus may be saying that when we become Christians and are united with him our sins that separated us from him are washed away, “our whole body is clean”, but we still need to regularly confess our daily sins – our feet that get dirty on the daily road of life.)

Sermon 3

Title: “Hands that broke bread”

Aim: To see the importance of meals and hospitality

Bible reading: John 21:1- 17

Introduction: *(You could begin this with a story of a recent special meal you attended and enjoyed like a wedding or birthday party.)*

Meals are a significant part of our life but not just for nourishment. We celebrate many important events in our lives with meals; birthdays, anniversaries, festivals like Christmas. We entertain our friends at meals. Weddings are celebrated with banquets; we entertain important guests at special dinners held in their honor.

The other thing associated with meals, which we take for granted, is the role of our hands. With our hands we prepare and serve and then eat the meal!

Meals and banquets feature prominently in the gospels and the life of Jesus. Jesus often introduces significant ideas and teaching over meals, he also uses them as a metaphor and teaching aid.

Eg: The wedding at Cana. (John 2:1-11)

The feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-14)

“I am the bread of life” (John 6:35)

Several parables feature a meal or a banquet:

The wedding banquet for the kings’ son. (Math. 22:1-14, also Luke 14: 1-23)

The story of the two sons. (15: 11-13.)

The meal at Simon the Pharisee’s house. (Luke 7:36-50)

The Passover and the last supper. (Luke 22:14-30)

The resurrection encounter at Emmaus. *(Luke 24:28-32. In this case it’s the hands breaking the bread and the words of the grace that breaks the spell of their despair and suddenly they ‘see’ that it is Jesus)*

Then there is breakfast on the beach the third resurrection encounter recorded in John 21: 1-17 which we will focus on in this sermon.

Biblical exposition - John 21: 1-17

The disciples had survived the traumatic events of Jesus’ arrest and trial and the horror of his crucifixion. On the third day Jesus appeared to them while they huddled in fear in the upper room. He soothed their anxieties and lifted their despair – ‘so it wasn’t all over after all!’

Some days later with new understanding and new hope rising in them Peter says “Lets go fishing” and seven of them set out in a boat for a nights fishing. (Remember a number of the core group of disciples were fishermen.) It’s as if they have to do something normal and familiar after the drama they have been through. Maybe it’s a way of ordinary practical tradesmen saying “Well we cant just sit around twiddling our thumbs, lets do something while we’re waiting for instructions, lets go fishing.” John, who was one of the seven, describes what happened that unforgettable morning in this way.

Read John 21:1-14

(What follows is a ‘narrative reconstruction’ of the events)

Imagine the scene on the lake shore – You have just dragged the boat up on the beach, its heavy with a big catch of fish and wet nets. You’re cold and wet too but happy with the

catch. As you walk up the beach you can smell the fire and the aroma of fresh bread and fish cooking, you suddenly realize how hungry you are!

As you join the circle of your friends around the fire Jesus is handing around the bread and cooked fish – the image almost overwhelms you – the memory of every meal you have shared with him floods your mind: The miracle of that bread and fish that just kept coming when he fed the crowd on the hillside; the last Passover together as he broke the bread and gave thanks..... As you reach out your hands he smiles at you as he hands you the bread and fish, and that smile, full of warmth, humor, love and friendship. Are you dreaming this?

You look down at his hands you remember them reaching out to touch and heal the sick, to accept the outcast, and then you notice the scars and you remember them stretched out in suffering on the cross. Then as he places the food in your open palms you feel the brush of his hand against yours – its like a stab of joy! And you realize with a tremendous surge of energy that he really is alive, he's here with you, right now. The dreams, the hopes, the future, hasn't died, it's only just begun and your part of it. Warm bread and grilled fish never tasted so good!

After breakfast the mood changes, a tense and challenging exchange takes place between Jesus and Peter, but it is heard by all. **(Read vs 15-17)**

In this conversation with Peter Jesus once again takes a meal and food and turns it into a metaphor to teach them about their future – “Feed my sheep” In other words you are now my hands in the world, my mission is now your mission – “as the Father has sent me so I send you” (John 20:21)

We are now Jesus' disciples and that mission is our mission and that means making sure that we feed his sheep, both the physically hungry and the spiritually hungry. We need to remember that the only thing that can ultimately satisfy people's inner spiritual hunger is Jesus who called himself the bread of life. Today in a country like Australia we have never been wealthier and yet never more spiritually starved. The nation is spiritually anorexic!

Questions for application:

1. Are you making sure that your satisfaction in life is coming from the bread of life or are you still seeking it somewhere else? Have you decided yet to grow up spiritually before you grow old?
2. In your daily and weekly conversations and contacts how can you gently direct people to the bread that satisfies?
3. How could you through hospitality reach out to people you know who are lonely?*
4. Jesus' image of the fully realized Kingdom of God is a banquet – the Messianic Banquet, where every tribe and nation will be present at the table and where there will be an abundance food and fellowship. How should this image of the future of those who belong to Jesus affect our attitudes and the way we live and act now?

* A 2011 poll conducted by Relationships Australia showed that 30% of Australians aged 25-34 said they frequently felt lonely, approx. 17% of those aged 50 – 59 said the same thing. (“Relationships Indicators Survey 2011”)

END.

SERMON 4.**Title: “Reach out and touch someone.”****Aim:** To emphasize the importance of connecting and relating to others, of reaching out to those who are lonely or suffering physical or emotional pain with empathy and compassion and friendship.**Bible reading:** Mark 5:21-43 (An OT reading could be Isaiah61: 1-3.)**Introduction:** Can you think of time when you were sick or grieving and a friend or a relative’s touch or hug or just their presence was so comforting. (*It would be good to share a personal story at this point*)

The importance of touch in patient recovery has long been known in nursing and research shows that barrier nursed patients recover more slowly.

We can also think of “touch” as a metaphor for positive relational connection with others. A visit, a phone call, an email, to stop and chat in the street or the supermarket, not just superficially but to take time to give yourself to others.

We need to be aware that it’s not just the elderly who can be lonely and isolated. A national survey conducted by Relationships Australia in 2011 showed that 30% of 25-34 year olds said they were frequently lonely. Our modern cities are full of people who live alone, the single young adult, the widowed and divorced, the disabled, these people often become “touch” deprived. While electronic social networks like Facebook can be a good way to keep in touch they are in the end no substitute for face to face contact.

Biblical exposition: In this passage from Mark 5: 21-43 we have two dramatic examples of the power of faith and the importance and significance of touch. (What follows is a narrative recreation of the events.)

*There are two very moving stories here; the first concerns the death of a child. There can be no more heart rending experience than the death of a child. The parent feels helpless as they watch their child’s life slip away. The parent in this story has a name, Jairus, he is a leader in the community, an elder in the local synagogue and his young daughter is dying. In a last desperate attempt to save his child’s life he finds Jesus whom the common people have come to revere as a teacher and healer. He pleads with him to come and **touch** his daughter, “Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live”. Jesus responds immediately and goes with him but a large crowd has gathered and presses in around them as they walk to the village and Jairus’s house. As they do so the second story unfolds.*

This is not the story of a sudden illness; this is the story of a woman who has suffered for years. She has suffered with a chronic, debilitating and very unpleasant illness that has left her an outcast, an untouchable! It also cuts her off from the traditional means of religious support and encouragement; she cannot go to the Synagogue or the Temple. Her chronic bleeding leaves her by Jewish law unclean and anyone she touches or who touches her or her clothing or bedding or sits where she has sat is unclean for seven days and must undergo a rite of purification .(See Leviticus 15:25-35) Imagine, in addition to the physical problems, the emotional and psychological damage this woman has endured through her isolation and exclusion. She has spent what little savings she had on cures that have not worked. It would be impossible for her to work and earn, she would be completely dependent on the charity of others just to survive. She is so desperate to be healed that hearing Jesus is in the village she joins the crowd, something she would not normally do as she would be in danger of making others unclean. She believes Jesus can heal her if only she can get close enough even to just touch his clothes.

Jesus is making his way closer to Jairus's house and the dying child. Imagine this woman in the crush of the crowd desperately trying to get close enough to him. She pushes forward, Jesus is just a few meters away, she squeezes her arm through the press of bodies and with one last desperate lunge she just manages to touch the edge of his cloak as he passes. But it is enough! Immediately she feels a surge of something through her body, the pain stops and the bleeding stops. At the same moment Jesus feels a surge of power going out from him. He stops and turns back to the crowd and asks "Who touched my clothes?" The disciples who are with Jesus are astonished at his question, with all the people pressing around him it could be anyone. As he continues to scan the crowd the woman comes forward and falls at his feet shaking with fear. She is afraid that Jesus or the crowd will turn on her for making them all unclean. But Jesus says to her "Daughter your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." He does not say anything about her uncleanness or her disobeying the law and the cultural customs.

Meanwhile Jairus must be increasingly anxious at the delay in getting to his daughter, and then some people arrive with the news he has been dreading, the girl has died, it's too late. "Why bother the teacher anymore" they say. Ignoring this Jesus says to Jairus "Don't be afraid, just believe." He then goes straight to the house and tells the wailing mourners to leave. They laugh at him when he says she is not dead but sleeping, they know a dead body when they see one. Death is no stranger to these village people in first century Palestine. Then Jesus once again does something unexpected and shocking he takes the girl's hand. This goes right against the Jewish law. It was very clear in the law that no one should touch a dead body or they would become unclean. (Numbers 19:11-22) Everyone present believed the girl was dead. What Jesus does is as shocking as his response to the woman with the bleeding who was also unclean. "Little girl" he says "Get up", and immediately she got up and walked around. Everyone was astonished.

Application: This account is rich in its implications for our theme that we are now the hands of Jesus in the world. Here are some ideas you could explore:

The significance of touch is a key to understanding this passage of scripture:

1. In the case of the woman and the child Jesus breaks with the custom and tradition that forbade touch in both cases and reached out to heal and renew. Often our inhibitions hinder us from reaching out to others in need. We don't want to intrude on people's privacy or some people make us feel uncomfortable or we find their lifestyle unacceptable, they might be alcohol or drug dependent or psychologically disturbed, or 'strange'. Sometimes reaching out to such people will bring criticism from both within and outside our churches. Our 'customs' sometimes deter us from reaching out to some people. Jesus is never inhibited by these things.
2. In the case of the sick and isolated woman it was her faith, expressed in reaching out to touch Jesus, which healed her and subsequently freed her from her isolation and rejection by the community. No matter how marginalized or unacceptable people feel we should encourage them to reach out to 'touch' Jesus because he will accept them just as they are and receive their desire to touch him however desperate or inappropriate it may seem to others.
3. In the case of Jairus he believed that if only he could bring Jesus to his child she would live – and he was right! Surely this is a model for us all as we seek to see our friends, members of our families and work colleagues brought alive spiritually and

healed both emotionally and physically. How do we bring Jesus to them? By prayer, example and respectful conversation.

End.

(Note: There are other ideas raised by this passage:

*We have noted earlier that Jesus doesn't need to touch to heal but often does, probably because touch is so significant for us.

*Jesus' attitude towards and his particular affirmation of women is seen here again. See also the incident of the woman caught in Adultery (John8:3-1), the woman who anointed his feet (Luke 7:36-50), and the woman at the well (John4:4-26)

*This passage also raises the issue of the basis of inclusion and exclusion of people in both the church and society.)

A song: A very appropriate song to accompany this sermon is "St. Theresa's" By John Michael Talbot 1987 (Birdwing Music CCLI Song #62229)

"Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes through which he looks,
Compassion on this world...."

Sermon five:

Title: “Hands of blessing”

Aim: To emphasize the importance of our ministry to children and youth.

Bible readings: Mathew 18:1-14, Mark 10:13-16.

Introduction: Do you ever think back to your childhood? What is your happiest memory? Mine was when.....But what about your unhappiest time? Mine was.....*(Share your personal stories here)*

Our childhood experiences shape us and significantly shape our future. How we respond to the challenges of life, how we make decisions, how we relate to others, etc. Today we put a lot of emphasis on the care, protection and education of our children. They have a very high priority in our society but it was not always so. In the first century in Jesus’s time children and woman were not given the same rights, respect or importance as men. They were considered inferior and marginalized. It is striking how Jesus goes out of his way to notice and affirm them.

Biblical exposition: In Mark 10:13-16 we see people coming to Jesus with their children for him to touch them but the disciples turn them away. They had the common view of the time that an important teacher like Jesus shouldn’t be bothered with children. Jesus is angry with his disciples and gathers the children in his arms and lays his hands on them in blessing. (Read Mark 10:13-16)

This action in Biblical and Jewish culture was a sign of more than affection; it is a symbolic action that confers status authority and blessing from God. Fathers passed on their inheritance, rights and the future of the family and clan to their children in this symbolic act. It is significant that Jesus says “The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Jesus is conferring great importance and significance on children in this action.

Now if we connect this with another incident when Jesus brings a little child into the circle of the disciples in Mathew 18: 1-9 we see how unusual and challenging is Jesus’s teaching on children and our responsibility to them. They are in fact to be a model for us! (Read Math 18:1-9)

This incident begins with a question to Jesus, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?” His answer is to bring a child into the group gathered around him and to say in effect that it is the trust, simplicity, unpretentiousness and dependence of children that is the model for how anyone gets into the Kingdom, and their humility is the criteria for judging greatness in the kingdom. Children are an example of Kingdom values! The person who will be great in God’s Kingdom is not the one focused on power and influence in the worldly sense, not the one preoccupied with prestige, self-importance and celebrity, not the one concerned about their rights, but the one who demonstrates in their life the humility, trust, simplicity and vulnerability of a child.

Then in verse 5 he says that when we welcome children **in his name** we welcome him. If we claim to be followers of Jesus then what we do and say is done “in his name.” We bear his name as Christians and so whatever we do brings honor or dishonor to him. But Jesus takes this a step further, when we as Christians welcome children we also welcome him. It is the same principle He explains in Mathew 25:31-40. Whenever we who bear his name

minister in compassion to the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned, the hungry and thirsty, we minister to him. It is an act of love not only to them but to Jesus and so an act of worship. This is as much an act of worship as our hymns and prayers. This is why Mother Teresa said she found Jesus in the face of the poor. So, welcoming children is to welcome and worship Jesus.

Then in verses 6-9 comes a stern warning about our responsibility to children and youth. We are to take great care that we put no barrier or stumbling block to their relationship with God. The metaphor Jesus uses here as a warning to us is graphic, (verse 6.) It is not the small millstone used by a woman to grind flour at home that is to be tied around the neck of an adult who causes a child to stumble; it is the large fixed millstone that was turned by a donkey walking in a circle, literally “a millstone of a donkey.” Jesus is making a point here very strongly!

Then in verses 7-9 the metaphor for action to avoid this becomes even more graphic. The temptations to fail our children and the implications of failing them are so serious we must deal with them radically – cut the temptations off and cut them out! The image Jesus uses is dramatic and confronting. The temptations can range from neglecting children in the life of the church to failing in our own personal example, from being unwilling to change and adapt to accommodate children to seeing them as a nuisance and a distraction. This teaching must be taken very seriously by us in our homes and families and in our churches.

Application.

Parents must be proactive in teaching their children the faith and Christian values and above all live a consistent Christian life before them. In our churches leaders and local congregational board members must place a high priority on children’s and youth ministry in terms of money, time, space and staff. Leaders and members must be willing to embrace change in worship and music if they are not to alienate their young people. The provision of special youth and children's services alongside traditional ones should be considered. We need to regularly review the resources and priority we give to this.

In the case of parents we need to remember it is not so much what we spend on our children but how much time we spend with them. Is the way we conduct our life and work and leisure conducive to developing our children’s character, their Christian knowledge and their spiritual life. Is this priority as important in reality as that of their general education?

Verses 10-14 further reinforce the great importance Jesus places on this. Their welfare is so important to God that their spiritual messengers have a special place before God and it is God's will that not one of these lambs be lost. It is hard to imagine how Jesus could have made his point about children more strongly.

If we go back to the image in Mark 10 of Jesus embracing and blessing the children let’s take away this question: “How can I / we embrace and bless our children more in this community?”

END

(Note: The other reference is Luke 9:46-48)

Sermon six

Title: “All you need is love”

Aim: To show that to reach out and love others, especially the unlovely and the emotionally damaged, requires a personal experience ourselves of love and grace that is life transforming - we need to know and experience God's love for us in Christ if we are to love like him

Bible reading: Luke 7:36-50 (Isaiah 53:1-12.)

Introduction: Begin by telling a personal story of a time when you experienced unexpected love and graciousness from someone that made a great impression on you.

Then with the knowledge of the cultural background to this event in Luke 7:36-50 outlined below* develop a narrative reconstruction filling in the cultural keys as you re tell the story.

In the event described by Luke in chp7:36 -50 there are two key people, a woman and a religious leader one has been changed by love the other not.

Jesus has been invited as the chief guest at a dinner party thrown by a Pharisee. The Pharisees were.....

Application: The key verse for application is verse 47. Because the woman, aware of her need, has responded to Jesus and found forgiveness and love is now able to give much love. It is only out of this kind of experience and awareness that we will have the motivation to love others, especially when the going gets tough. On the other hand Simon in his self-contained self-righteousness has experienced little of God's love and so has little to give

Questions to explore:

Can you remember when you first felt the love and forgiveness of God?

Do you need to renew that feeling?

How can you get in touch with it again?

***The cultural background to this story** from Luke's gospel is important to understand the full significance of what takes place:

- (a) Whenever you invited a guest to your house in the Palestine of Jesus' day you would do three traditional things as you met them at the door as a sign of welcome and hospitality. You greeted them with the kiss of peace on their cheek, water was supplied to wash their feet and a dot of perfumed oil was placed on their forehead. It appears from what Jesus says in verses 44-46 that Simon did not extend this courtesy to Jesus. Maybe he was keeping his distance from the radical teacher and the invitation was to check him out, he didn't want to appear too friendly.
- (b) People did not usually sit in chairs at a table but they reclined on rugs with a low table in the center for the food and so people's legs and feet would be stretched out towards the edge of the room.
- (c) Usually only the men ate together and the women served the food and stood around at the edge of the room or courtyard. There they could catch the conversation or teaching of the visiting Rabbi. Servants and even others from the village might come and stand in the background to hear the teacher. This is probably how the woman with the oil comes to be there, she certainly would not have been invited by

Simon to the meal. She had probably already heard and been touched by Jesus earlier as he taught in the villages.

- (d) The host of this meal, Simon, is a Pharisee. They were a group of Jews at the time that adhered strictly to the Law and all the detailed Scribal instructions as to how it should be applied. eg: No work was to be done on the Sabbath but what was work? Were the tying of knots work? Well some were and some were not so the scribal instructions went! A Camel drivers knot or a sailors knot was a work knot but the knot that a woman tied in her tunic belt was not! And so on and on went the detail, the 'jot and tittle' of the law, the burden laid on ordinary people that Jesus said was too great for them to bear.
- (e) A respectable Jewish woman at the time would always have her hair pinned up or platted and covered. To have ones hair free and flowing was a sign of immodesty and disrespect. Prostitutes would advertise themselves in this manner. The woman is described as being known in the village as 'a sinner.'
- (f) Among strict Jews like the Pharisees any one being touched by a person who was seen to be a 'sinner' and spiritually unclean would themselves become ritually unclean and unable to attend the temple or synagogue until they purified themselves. (See verse 39) Certainly the incident of a crying woman of doubtful morality wiping Jesus' feet with her flowing hair, kissing and then rubbing oil into his feet at a dinner party would have created quite a scene!

END.