

Hands and Feet

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

3rd in a four-week study

December 17, 2017

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Isaiah 61:1–2a (NIV)

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor . . .

Luke 4:16–21 (NIV)

¹⁶ He [Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

A Saturday like no other.

It's a typical Saturday in Nazareth. The sun is up early. It's warm. Since no work can be done on the Sabbath, many of the villagers sleep a bit later. It is the day set aside to rest, as God had rested after creating the world. After morning prayers and a morning meal, the villagers make their way to the small synagogue where they will hear and then discuss passages from the Torah and from the Prophets. One man will read from the Hebrew while another translates it into Aramaic, as many of the villagers neither read nor speak Hebrew.

On this particular day, a villager by the name of Jesus, the middle-aged son of Joseph and Mary, rises to read from the Prophets. The scroll of Isaiah is brought to him. Jesus unrolls it to the desired section and begins to read, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. . . .” All eyes in the synagogue are on their neighbor as he reads. A stunned silence falls across the room as Jesus proclaims that God's great promises are being fulfilled on that quiet Saturday morning.

Luke's account of what happens after Jesus sits down is perplexing and difficult to understand. Though everyone in the synagogue that day was stunned by what they heard, some probably heard the shocking proclamation with grace and wonder. Could it be that God's prophet, even God's anointed one, could come from Galilee, from Nazareth? We can be sure that many others responded with derision. Wasn't this just the boy from down the block!? In the end, wonder and derision both turned to anger as Jesus explained that his anointing would be not just for the Jews, but for the Gentiles also.¹ Not just for the Jewish poor, but for the world's poor. In Jesus, all the blind would

¹ In the rest of the passage, (4:16-30), Jesus reminds them, for example, that Elijah and Elisha had both gone to the Gentiles. Also, Jesus' first miracles were in Capernaum, not Nazareth. Capernaum, the town on

see and all the captives would be freed, irrespective of race, gender, or nationality – or even their covenantal status with God. And his neighbors ran Jesus out of town for it.

Jesus' countless healings, his welcoming of tax-collectors and prostitutes, and his forgiving of sins were all acts of caring compassion, but they were far more. Jesus made the blind see because in the kingdom of God there are no blind. Jesus ate with outcasts because in the kingdom of God there are no outcasts. He made the lame walk, because in the kingdom of God there are no lame. He forgave sins because with the arrival of God's kingdom, the prisoners had been set free.

Jesus enacted the kingdom of God in all that he said and did. And he called his disciples to such caring acts as well. In them, we not only care for those who need caring, we pull God's future into the present. Every act of love we perform is an eschatological moment, giving a glimpse of the coming marriage of heaven and earth.

Loving with hands and feet

Luke tells us that Jesus was once approached by a lawyer who asked him what he must "do to inherit eternal life." Jesus asked the lawyer what was written in the law and the lawyer replied, "You shall love the Lord your God . . . and your neighbor as yourself" (see Luke 10:25-37). Jesus told the lawyer he had answered correctly. But of course, being a lawyer, the man asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied by telling a story, the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this story, a Jewish man, lying injured by the side of the road, was refused help by a priest and then a Levite (the priestly tribe of Israel), only to be helped by a Samaritan, who was the true neighbor. Further, the Samaritan went the full distance in helping the injured man, giving of his time and his money.

It is hard for us to grasp how shocking this story would have been to the good Jews listening to Jesus. It would be as if Jesus told the story in an Israeli café today, with an Israeli schoolgirl lying injured, refused help by a Rabbi and an Israeli soldier, only to be helped by a member of Hamas! You see, the Jews of Jesus' day despised the Samaritans, holding them to be little better than dogs. Jesus' listeners would have been angered by the story, but they might have also grasped the depth and universality of God's command to love their neighbors, with actions and not in mere words.

Jesus' announcement in Nazareth was a proclamation of the arrival of God's kingdom, a kingdom built upon a foundation of sacrificial love. Of course, the kingdom's arrival seems an odd claim to make. Evil was then and is still a present reality. In light of suffering and hatred, how could Jesus proclaim the coming of God's kingdom? Richard Hays answers such questions this way, "Why do the powers of wickedness continue to operate effectively in this world? Because the story is not over. The climactic victory has been won on the Cross, but there is still much residual resistance. So we live in a tension-filled interval where skirmishes are still under way." But do we really have a role to play in the full realization of the kingdom of God? If so, what is it?

God's plan to transform, renew, and restore all of creation is to be worked out *through* us. Jesus asked his disciples how they could possibly be the light to the world if they kept the light hidden from others (Matt. 5:14-16). He told them to go out and make disciples across the entire planet. As selfish, prideful, and weak as we humans tend to be, God, in his wisdom, sends us out to do his work. And he has sent his Holy Spirit to guide us and strengthen us, so that we will not insist upon turning inward to our own needs, but will turn outward in compassion and caring.

And so as we approach Christmas Day, we are reminded that the love of Christmas is to be seen not merely in song and kind words, but every time we are willing to put our hands and feet to work on behalf of others. In many ways, it is the reason for the season.

the Sea of Galilee that Jesus would make his ministry headquarters had a sizeable Gentile population. "Who was Jesus to go the Gentiles?," the villagers thought to themselves.

Daily Bible Readings

This week: *More on being Jesus' hands and feet*

Monday, Leviticus 19:1-18 God instructs Israel on the true meaning of love.

Tuesday, Isaiah 54:4-10 The compassion that is God's everlasting love.

Wednesday, Luke 6:27-36 Jesus talks about loving those who are the hardest to love.

Thursday, Acts 9:36-46 Tabitha is the one who has cared for the widows and now she has died.

Friday, 1 Timothy 5:4-8 Caring for widows (the most marginalized group in ancient cultures) and for one's own family

Saturday, Job 31: 16-23 Job claims that he has treated others with love.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the gospel of John.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

This class will not meet on December 25 and Jan 1

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Samuel.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

This class will not meet on December 26

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Current series: *The First Days of Jesus*

This class will not meet on 12/24 and 12/31