

Sermon for Sunday, April 23, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"THE HAND OF JESUS NO. 3 - HAND WITH THE MULTICOLORED FINGERS"

St. Matthew 12:46-50

Text: "And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

Today we continue our series on the Hand of Jesus. There are many passages of Scripture when it is reported that Jesus stretched out his hand to touch someone. Two Sundays ago we talked about Jesus stretching out his hand to touch someone with healing. Last Sunday we talked about Jesus stretching out his hand to catch the man who was overboard. Today we are going to talk about an incident when Jesus stretched out his hand to his disciples and said, "Behold, here are my mother and my brothers."

Most of us are familiar with the story of the prodigal son. He took his inheritance and traveled to a far country. There he spent what he had and at last found himself destitute and hungry. Just to eat he hired himself out as a keeper of pigs. But I have always suspected that the hunger he was experiencing was far greater than material or physical hunger. It is true he had material and physical needs, but down deep I suspect that the greatest need of all was for someone who loved him and cared for him. He most of all was starved for love, starved for someone who cared for him and to whom he mattered.

Isn't that true in your life? When you are away from home on a business trip, one usually has all of the material needs of life readily available. There is a nice motel room, a restaurant, and even a television to watch. Yet, there is something missing--an aching loneliness not for just human companionship, but for companionship where one is loved and cared about. In one of my former pastorates there was a family in the congregation who had adopted a little girl. As she grew up and started to school, the other children began to tease her one day and say to her that she was only adopted. You know how cruel children can be. She fled home in tears and flinging herself into her mother's arms she cried out, "Mommy, do I really belong to you?" Yes, we all have this need to belong--the need to have someone who loves and cares about us even though they know us very well.

Some of you here this morning know what I am talking about. You have lost a mate or another loved one close to you and there is an emptiness--a vacuum--in your life that nothing nor any one truly can fill. But this is not only true emotionally, it is also true in our spiritual lives. We need a place, we need other people, with whom we identify as our spiritual family. We need a spiritual place where we belong. Several years ago a family joined our congregation from another church. They had spiritual roots there that were deep. They had been charter members when the congregation was organized and she had been responsible for the cross placed on the altar. Yet, because they could not agree with what was happening in their congregation they felt compelled to leave. She told me about it with tears in her eyes. It was so painful to pull up roots where one had belonged and had been spiritually secure.

Some of you here this morning have been members of Central for many years. In some cases it has been literally generations. It is your spiritual home and it is important to you. It is a place where you not only belong, but where you feel a special identity with God.

In the days of Jesus this same spiritual need had characterized the Jews. It was the days of the so-called diaspora--the dispersion of the Jews. They were scattered over the face of the globe, living in every major city of the world. Yet,

in the Gentile world they felt themselves aliens and spiritual strangers. The Holy City of Jerusalem was like a magnet that drew them back again and again over the years. In Jerusalem they belonged--there they felt a special identity, a special relationship to God. Those of you who watched Holocaust on television and saw the terrible sufferings of the Jews can appreciate in a fresh way why Jerusalem has been so important to the modern Jew. It is a spiritual rallying point for all their hopes and dreams as a people. Like the psalmist of all they have cried, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!" (Psalm 137:4-6)

Here in this country we live a highly mobile world. People are constantly being transferred, moved from one community to another. And there develops in their lives a spiritual rootlessness. They have no spiritual place where they belong and of which they are a part. I think much of the problems we have with young people today--much of the breakdown in families with its resultant divorce and frequent unfaithfulness is because people are spiritually adrift. They have no spiritual place where their roots are down deep and as Jesus once said in a parable, where there are no roots, the plant soon withers and dies.

It is at this point that our text for this morning speaks to us. Jesus was speaking to the people and his mother and his brothers came and asked to speak to him. Jesus asked the question, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And then the Bible says, "And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'"

The first thing I want you to notice is that Jesus identifies himself with us. God knows your name. God created you. God loves you and cares about you. The Bible tells us in the first chapter of St. John that God came down to earth and pitched his tent among us. That means that in the incarnation God identifies himself with us

Truly the Christian religion is unique in this respect. The ancient gods of the Greeks lived atop Mt. Olympus. They lived in seclusion from man and his needs, having no care or concern for him. They cared not that women wept or little children cried or that men cried out under burdens too heavy to carry. But Jesus cares! That day when he stretched out his hand and cried, "Here are my mother and my brother" he included you and me. We belong. God cares. We are a part of his spiritual family.

Back in the days when St. Louis was truly the gateway to the west, white men out on the western frontier often had occasion to get to know the red man well. It was often the case that two such men would become friends and they would commit themselves to one another as brothers. In a far deeper sense, Jesus on the cross died for your sins and mine. He shed his blood that we might become brothers with him and sons of God. What he did on the cross made him blood brother to each of us.

So the first thing we notice in our scripture is that Jesus offers us membership in the family of God. The second thing I want you to notice is how we claim that membership. Our scripture for today says, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." How do you get to be a member of God's family? Jesus says by doing God's will. Are you doing God's will this morning? A lot of people are asking about wills today. Unions are asking, "What is the will of the working man?" Big business is asking, "What is the will of the corporations?" Young people are saying, "We want to do what we want to do." More and more people today are saying, "We want what we want and we want it now. Our will be done!" But who is asking today what God's will is? Are we asking about things, "Is this God's will for me?" When it comes to how you spend your money, are you seeking God's will? When it comes to how you deal with your family and your loved ones, are you asking God's will? When it comes to the expression of your sexual desires and your emotional needs, are you seeking God's will? When it comes to making business decisions, are you asking God's will?

Yes, Jesus says that the man who does his Father's will is his brother. Are you doing God's will in your life this morning? And what if you are not? Does it have any serious implications about your relationship to Jesus or to the Father? "Yes," says Jesus, "whoever does the will of my father...is my brother..."

But the third thing I want to call to your attention is the word "whoever." Jesus says, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." If a black man does the will of God, is he the brother of Jesus? If a red man or a yellow man does God's will, is he Jesus' brother? If a rich man or a poor man; if an educated man or an illiterate man; if an attractive person or an ugly person--if all of them do the will of God, are they brothers with Jesus? Well, that's what the Bible says. And if they are brothers and I am a brother, too, what does that make us? Are we not brothers also?

The limits to the household of God are spiritual only. God has no racial limits. He has no financial limits. He has no educational limits. He has no social limits. The only limitation is that a man do the will of God. I remember once reading a story of a very selfish little girl who had lost both of her parents. Her aunt, who had several children of her own, brought her home to live with her. The little girl was introduced to the other children in the family, but being very selfish, she said to her aunt, "But I don't want them. I want just you." "Yes," replied the aunt, "but if you take me, you have to take them, too."

That's the way it is, isn't it? If we want to take Jesus, we have to take all the other brothers and sisters. Jesus stretches out his hand to us and if we put our hand in his, we discover a hand with multicolored fingers--multicolored because whoever does God's will is our brother and our sister.

Many years ago a man on his way to London stopped off at a small village church to worship. The man was surprised to find himself moved to tears by the powerful eloquence of the humble preacher. Through his influence, this humble man was invited to London to fill a pulpit on a Sunday, and such was the appeal of his sermon that before he returned home, he had been offered a big church in that city. His future was secure and no longer would he and his family have to scrape by on a few pounds a year. At last when the day came for them to leave the little village, as they came out of the manse door to enter the packed van, they beheld a strange spectacle. There around the moving van, on their knees, praying and weeping, were all of the townspeople. "John Fawcett," said his wife, "I don't know how we can go." "Neither do I," replied the minister. "Unload the wagon. We shall stay where we are needed the most." That same evening, with great peace in his heart,

John Fawcett sat down at his desk and wrote some words. For almost two hundred years, wherever Christians meet, these words are sung. They have brought comfort and peace to literally millions of people. That night, John Fawcett wrote, "Blest be the tie that binds, our hearts in Christian love, the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above."

Yes, Jesus stretched forth his hand and said, "Here is my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." Whoever we are, Jesus offers us a place to belong with our heavenly father. And whoever of us will do God's will is his brother and his sister--and we are brothers with all who put their hand in Jesus' hand--the hand with the multicolored fingers. Yes, for blest be the tie that binds, our hearts in Christian love..."

Yes, Jesus says that the man who does his Father's will is his brother. We you doing God's will in your life this morning? And what if you are not? Does it have any serious implications about your relationship to Jesus or to the Father? "Yes," says Jesus, "whoever does the will of my Father... is my brother..."

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That's the way it is, isn't it? If we want to take Jesus, we have to take all the other brothers and sisters. Jesus stretches out his hand to us and he says, "I will take you in, but I will take you in with multicolored fingers--multicolored brothers and sisters."

Many years ago a man of his way to London stopped off at a small village. The man was surprised to find himself moved to tears by the appearance of the heroic preacher. Through his religious, this humble man was enabled to ponder to fill a pulpit on a Sunday, and such was the appeal of his sermon that before he returned home, he had been offered a big church in that city. His future was secure and no longer would he and his family have to struggle for a few pennies a year. At last when the day came for him to leave the little village, as they came out of the manse they to enter the parsonage, they had a strange spectacle. There around the way, on their knees, praying and weeping, were all of the townspeople. "John Fawcett," said his wife, "I don't know how we are to go." "Father do I," replied the minister, "loaded the wagon. We shall say where we are needed the most." That same evening, with great peace in his heart,