

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sexagesima Sunday, February 20, 2022

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 351, 237:1, 141, 375, 343:7.
Lessons: Isaiah 57: 15-21, Acts 4: 23-32a, Luke 6:6-11.
Sermon Text: Mark 3: 1-6. (See also Matthew 12:9-14)
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Today as we look at a miracle of Jesus, we want to emphasize the more important aspect of Jesus' ministry on earth. Jesus came to earth first and foremost to die for the sins of all mankind. His own people, the Israelites, the people to whom he would first be sent would be the ones to take his life, to execute him unjustly. That idea is consistent with the fact that God sent his innocent, only-begotten Son to pay the price of sin for the guilty human race. The religious leaders of the Jews, including the Pharisees, would lead that attempt to take Jesus' life.

Today we see Jesus showing God's love by healing a man with a withered hand. But this also motivated his enemies to get together to kill him. At the end of this text, the Pharisees and the Herodians consult together how they might destroy Christ. But Scripture also says Jesus was angry at those who should have been first in showing love for a crippled fellow human. Today we see that

JESUS SHOWS LOVE FOR A MAN WITH A WITHERED HAND

1. We see Jesus' love – and his anger!
2. Sinful mankind has no use for God and seeks to take Jesus' life.

We read in Mark's gospel that *“he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them [and we later learn they were Pharisees] were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, ‘Stand up in front of every-one.’ Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they remained silent.”* Did you notice that they would not answer his direct question? There was a man present at that worship service whose right hand was shriveled. Would Jesus heal him on the Sabbath? Although this is not Jesus' first encounter with those who wanted to kill him, Scripture tells us that they became furious and plotted to kill him after this miracle.

In fact, in Matthew's account they even asked Jesus whether it would be legal to heal on the Sabbath. *“Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’ He said to them, ‘If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’”* Matthew 12: 10-12. Although Mark has Jesus asking the question and Matthew has the Pharisees asking the question, Scripture is right in both places. They may have asked the question first, Jesus may have repeated it, and then answered it as Matthew records.

The Word of God makes it very clear that some of Jesus' enemies were looking for a reason to accuse him, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal this man with the withered hand on the Sabbath day. Jesus had this man stand up in front of everyone. Then Jesus asks them a very leading question. He gives them a choice. *“Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”* Is it the right and proper thing, should people feel this as their obligation, to do good, to save life, to be of assistance to one's neighbor on the Sabbath? Or can it be possible that anyone should want to advocate the doing of evil, the destroying of life, on that day?

When we look at Luther's explanation of the Fifth Commandment, we learn "We should fear and love God that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and befriend him in every bodily need."

The omission of a good deed, the neglect of some act of kindness, is, in fact, equal to actual murder in a case where the personal well-being of a fellow human is concerned. The conscience of every man should tell him that on the Sabbath, as well as on any other day, deeds of mercy are not only permitted, but very plainly commanded. We should help and befriend our neighbor in every bodily need. But Jesus' enemies remain silent. The Pharisees here deliberately hardened their hearts. They would not yield to this Teacher, and so they stubbornly refused to answer.

Jesus answered the question with the example of one of their own sheep falling into a pit on the Sabbath day, which all of them would have hauled out. It was indeed lawful to heal on the Sabbath, but these Pharisees and their teachers before them had so limited the right even of a physician to bring help on a Sabbath that he was permitted to do so only if the patient was in imminent danger of death. This is an example of man-made laws which false teachers claim is taught in Scripture or is based on what Scripture teaches. Compassion and mercy were totally ignored, except when it came to their livestock, and their own personal and earthly possessions were at stake. They had twisted the Sabbath commandment into cruel and inflexible demands. Jesus here teaches that love does not violate the law but rather fulfills it. Especially on the Sabbath day are we encouraged to do good. If we neglect acts of charity, acts of love, we violate love which is the essence of the Sabbath law. Acts of love on the Sabbath do not break the Sabbath law, but they are actually necessary, if this commandment is to be obeyed. And the works of love which can and should be done today must not be deferred until tomorrow. We don't know what will happen tomorrow.

In the previous chapter Mark told us that the Lord had already attempted to set them straight when "***he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.'***" Mark 2:27. Deep in their hearts they knew that Christ was right, but in their hatred for him they refused to admit it.

This man's withered hand, perhaps even as the result of injury by accident or by disease, would likely have disabled him from working for his living. The healing day is the Sabbath, the healing place is the house of prayer, the synagogue, but the healing power is from Christ. Jesus puts his adversaries to shame. Jesus makes this miracle as conspicuous as possible. He requests the man with the withered hand to step into the middle of the group.

Jesus' enemies had murderous thoughts toward Jesus. He was seeking to save life. Which was really breaking the Sabbath? That is the key to the next statement, one of but a few of its kind concerning our Lord: he looked around at them in anger. This is one of those rare places where Jesus is angry.

Mark says "***he looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.'***" Then, of course, Jesus healed him. All the man had to do was stretch out, to hold out his hand and Scripture says his hand was completely restored. Like this man if we will not stretch out our hands in faith toward God, it is our own fault that we are not healed. But if we are healed, Christ and his power and grace must have all the glory.

Jesus was angry at the sin, and grieved, deeply distressed, at the sinner which is the true standard of Christian anger. But which of us can separate anger at sin from anger at the sinner? Men become angry very easily, but not without sinning; but Christ is angry without sin. Jesus was filled with righteous indignation over such unreasonable, sinful stubbornness. And he was deeply grieved over the stubbornness, the callousness, the blindness of their hearts. The anger of Jesus is always directed against the transgression, against the sin. For the sinners themselves, the Lord has only the feeling of deepest sorrow and desire for repentance. One writer tells us "By a long resistance to the grace and Spirit of God, their hearts had become callous; they were past feeling. By a long opposition to the light of God, they became dark in their understanding, were blinded by the deceitfulness of sin, and thus were past seeing. By a long continuance in the practice of every evil work, they were cut off from all union with God, the Fountain of spiritual life; and, [being completely] dead in trespasses and sins, they were incapable of any [change] except through the miraculous power of God."

Their hardness of heart was shown by their fault finding, by their evil thoughts, and by their silence to his questions. Jesus' anger was anything but sinful. It was combined with deep distress at their stubborn hearts, for they were not only violating the spiritual sense of the Sabbath but were also rejecting him as Savior.

Jesus did not touch the man's shriveled hand or even speak a word of healing. He simply said, "***Stretch out your hand***", and the man was completely healed. Neither having spoken a word of healing nor having touched the man, Jesus technically could not be accused of violating the Pharisees' unscriptural Sabbath law. This outraged them more than ever.

Then Mark simply says "***Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.***" Not only did they violate the Sabbath commandment, for their hearts were not filled with thoughts of worship that day, but they also made themselves guilty of breaking the fifth commandment "You shall not murder." Matthew doesn't even mention the Herodians, but he says after the man stretched out his hand and it was completely healed: "***the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.***" Matthew 12:14. Luke says even more. "***But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.***" Luke 6:11.

The Pharisees felt they had had enough. Without waiting for anything further on the part of Jesus, they left the synagogue. Their minds were made up about what they were going to do. Now they only had to find ways and means to carry out their design. It was not only the fact that their rigid Sabbath-keeping had been attacked, and that, in their opinion, the Sabbath had been broken by the performance of the miracle of healing, but that the miracle brought fame to Jesus, and that they had been humiliated in being unable and unwilling to answer his simple question without making their own position look foolish. So we could say that it was nothing but vengeful spite that moved them. As they sought allies, they chose the Herodians in their attempt to kill Jesus. The Herodians were Jews who supported King Herod and the Roman government. Thus they were people whom the Pharisees would ordinarily have had nothing to do with. But in hating Christ and plotting his death they felt they needed the support of some people who were able to wield some secular power. Both these groups did the same things later when Jesus was tried before Pontius Pilate.

The Herodians would easily be influenced against Christ, if the Pharisees would point out the growing influence of Jesus over the common people, who might soon be ready to recognize and praise him as the promised Messiah. So these two groups, otherwise not the best of friends, readily agreed against Jesus, how they might destroy him. Hatred makes strange bedfellows. Jesus' act of love stirred his enemies into rage. They cannot do anything about it right at this time. His enemies begin at once to consult with one another for the purpose of taking his life. The Pharisees and Herodians, that is, 'the People's party' and 'the ruling class', usually bitter enemies, now join hands. They are united by hatred for Jesus. But Jesus' hour was not yet come. When he sees their conspiracy, he departs with his disciples. He would not expose himself before his time.

In this text we see Jesus' love in his gentle pastoral care and loving mercy which receives the weak and those who are hurting. We see Jesus' anger with sin. And we see the hatred of the leaders of the Jews boiling up against him. His ministry is to redeem mankind from sin. And he must die to do that, the innocent in the place of the guilty, the sinless in the place of the sinner. The wheels are set in motion toward his crucifixion. But he continues on in love, so that you and I and all mankind might be saved eternally simply by believing in Jesus Christ as Savior. Praise be to God for our Savior who endured what he did on earth so that we might live in joy eternally. Amen.

Revised from a Ministry By Mail sermon for February 22, 2009.