



Sermon, Sunday September 22, 2024

“Stretch Out Your Hand”

SCRIPTURE: Mark 3:1-6 ¹Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ²They were watching him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come forward.” ⁴Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. ⁵He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Introduction: Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

Today’s text is about the Sabbath controversy. Mark tells us that a serious conflict arose between Jesus and the Pharisees over the Sabbath.

Today’s story takes place in a synagogue. There was a man with a shriveled hand, and on the other side were people who wanted to accuse Jesus. Jesus called the man in front of the people. Then Jesus asked them, **“Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?”** (v. 4)

When Jesus told this story, they were silent. Jesus, knowing that their hearts were hardened, was deeply distressed and looked around at them in anger. He then said to the sick man, **“Stretch out your hand.”** And his hand was healed. After this happened, the Pharisees went out and plotted with the Herodians how to kill Jesus. As we can see from today’s text, the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over the Sabbath escalated to a plot to kill Jesus. Why did the Pharisees, the most devout and exemplary Jews, think of killing Jesus? Was the Sabbath issue so important to Jesus that it was worth risking his life?

Body: Human stubbornness and faith

If we look at today’s text superficially, there is no great fault on the part of the Pharisees. The sick person Jesus met in the synagogue was not someone who would die right away. If so, it is fundamental and reasonable to heal the sick person after the Sabbath according to the Sabbath regulations of Jewish law. Here, fundamental means that it is in accordance with the Sabbath regulations, and reasonable means that doing so will benefit the sick person, the Pharisees, the community, and Jesus. This is because no matter how right something is, it is desirable to resolve it without hurting either party if possible.

However, in this situation, Jesus asked the Pharisees, **“Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?”** No one will say that to kill life is lawful in response to this question. Furthermore, Jewish law also made exceptions to the Sabbath regulation regarding matters related to human life. Therefore, Jesus’ question in today’s text was meaningless to the Pharisees. The question raised by the Pharisees in today’s text was not logically wrong. So why was Jesus deeply distressed and why did he become angry?

Because the Pharisees’ claim that the sick should be healed after the Sabbath in today’s text. This is not illogical, but it is not lifesaving.



No matter how good the law in the world is, if it is used to kill rather than save life, it becomes worthless. That is why the person who uses the law is more important than the law itself. In other words, the law can save life only when someone with the right attitude toward people uses the law. If not, the law can be used to kill people.

The sick man in today's text was a plasterer, according to the Apocrypha. (In biblical literature, works outside an accepted canon of scripture) A plasterer makes a living by using his hands. For a plasterer, not being able to use his hands is directly related to his livelihood. In today's text, Jesus was so concerned about the survival of this sick man that he disobeyed the Sabbath regulations. In contrast, the Pharisees prioritized keeping the Sabbath regulations of the law. Jesus had to heal the sick man immediately, while the Pharisees thought that they had to heal the sick man after the Sabbath.

The most important point of today's text is not whether we keep the Sabbath regulations of the law, but that the stubborn heart of man plays a decisive role in killing rather than saving life. The expression in verse 5 of today's text, **“Jesus looked around at them with anger; he was deeply distressed at their hardness of heart”** clearly shows what Mark is trying to convey to us through today's text. There are only a few scenes in the Gospel where Jesus gets angry at people. The Gospels record Jesus getting angry when his disciples tried to stop little children from coming to him and when people bought and sold things in the temple for their own gain. Also, in today's text, Jesus got angry at people. However, there was something in common when Jesus got angry at people. It was when people's hearts became hardened.

Human stubbornness is the root of unbelief. In other words, when a person's heart becomes hardened, they cannot believe in God.

In today's text, Jesus looked at the hardened Pharisees with an angry face and commanded the sick man, **“Stretch out your hand.”** When he did as he was commanded and stretched out his hand, the sick man's hand was healed. Through this incident, Jesus proved his words that it is right to save lives on the Sabbath.

Remember, Jesus, the Lord of life, fought against situations that threatened people's lives. Many healing incidents in the Bible are like that. Jesus' command in verse 5 of today's text, **“Stretch out your hand,”** is the exclusive authority of Jesus, the Son of God, the Lord of life. In human life, not only physical illness but also sin destroys life. That is why Jesus declared to people, **“Your sins are forgiven.”** In the world, illness, sin, disability, and demon possession are all forces that destroy life. All the gospel writers proclaim that these forces were overcome by Jesus.

Conclusion: “Stretch out your hand”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Jesus' command in today's text, **“Stretch out your hand,”** is the unique authority of the Lord, the Lord of life. All the Lord's churches in the world must do their best to save life, not kill life, according to Jesus' command.

For the church to handle this task well, we must understand the meaning of the Sabbath debate between Jesus and the Pharisees. Verses 5 and 6 of today's text contrast the man whose hand was restored to normal with the Pharisees who plotted to kill Jesus. In these passages, we see the Pharisees whose mental illness was not healed, but we see the sick person whose physical illness was healed.

We must be alert to the fact that mental illness is more difficult to cure than physical illness, and that mental illness is much more unfortunate than physical illness. In other words, we must ask ourselves whether we, like the Pharisees, have mental illness. The criterion for distinguishing mental illness within us is whether we accept the law as an absolute value or whether we accept life that saves people.

I hope that we all follow Jesus' command to extend our hands and fulfill the mission of the church to save lives. Also, I hope that we will enjoy the blessings that go beyond physical and mental disabilities. **Amen!**

