

MEDITATION 23

Mark 3: 1-5

Again Jesus entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² They were watching him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." ⁴ Then 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. ⁵ He 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.

Again Jesus entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² They were watching him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

It is the Sabbath (like our Sunday), and everyone in the community is at the synagogue for worship. The word synagogue means: a gathering of God's people for worship. It is a day to focus on your spirit and spiritual things. So what should be the focus on a spiritual day? Jesus has just told them that "the Sabbath is made for human kind, not human kind for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). This means it is meant to serve people not neglect or harm them. It is meant to inspire healing toward wholeness. Healing is not just about the spirit, but about the mind and the body too. How may the spirit support the mind and the body rather than contribute to its harm? How may Sabbath observance serve spiritual healing toward greater wholeness?

Well, but then, we need to ask: how should we observe Sabbath? Yes, it's about doing "spiritual" things and practices that promote spiritual development. It's about self-examination before God, seeking truth, inspiration, courage, clarity, comfort, direction, faith, hope and love... But all these things are also relational. We live before God and in relation to all life around us. We cannot experience healing toward wholeness as isolated selves. Our whole being is being-in-relation. How may Sabbath help or hinder such being-in-relation with the love of God as the foundation?...

Let's think about that for a moment... You are, I am, a being of love in relation... Whether I want or don't want to think about certain relations, they are still a part of me... How do they live in me and how do they shape my way of being as I enter and practice spiritual things on the Sabbath?... How does self-examination, truth-seeking, inspiration, courage, clarity, comfort, direction, faith, hope and, of course, love as foundational to all else shape my being-in-relation?

And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." ⁴ Then 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.

Why are they silent? Have they never thought of the Sabbath in that way, as an observance that inspires certain action and restrains or prevents other action?...

How has Sabbath observance shaped how you live your life in relation to others? How has it inspired you to engage or re-engage a particular situation or relationship? Has faith and hope risen up in you and has love opened up or softened your heart? Have you found some clarity or felt deeper confirmation for a particular direction, decision or choice in your life? Have you discerned certain insights about your feelings or behaviour in certain situations or relationships? Has Sabbath observance challenged you in some way or lifted you up when you have felt down, judged or inadequate in yourself?...

If Sabbath is not about life in relation but about the observance itself, what's the point?...

Jesus 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.

What is "hardness of heart"? It is when you cannot feel in a situation. Whether it's empathy, sympathy, compassion, sorrow... or else anger at an injustice... Hardness of heart blocks your capacity to feel...

Opening your heart to feel makes you vulnerable and powerful at the same time. For some people, to feel is to be weak. To harden your heart is to be strong and invulnerable. But at what cost?... Jesus is both angry and sad. He sees with his heart and acts accordingly. For Jesus, Sabbath is intended to cultivate this trust in your heart opening wherever it takes you... Sabbath is about not being afraid to make yourself vulnerable... It is not about being taken advantage of or walked all over, no! It takes practice to keep your heart soft and open to feel while also being vigilant to resist being used and abused in your kindness and grace...

Because the authorities have a hardness of heart, they cannot feel for the man who suffers an ailment that seriously impairs his life. What better day than a Sabbath to experience a physical healing to accompany his spiritual awakening?...

Compassion, care, love as a healing presence... Whether someone experiences healing of some kind, comfort in their pain, or a sense of being companioned and listened to rather than isolated in their trouble, this is all part of what Sabbath is supposed to inspire...

In what way may Sabbath observance be leading you to open your heart further, and with discernment of course, discernment in the direction of where it is you are opening your heart and where you need to be mindful of your limits. For where there is burnout or "compassion

fatigue” hardness of heart will set in too. How may you be inspired in your Sabbath experience to open your heart ever wider despite the risk?...

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for Sabbath... Thank you for the opportunity for self-examination, for the seeking, searching and opening to your love and grace so that our heart remains soft for all the anger and hurt, the betrayal, the misunderstanding and the breakdown of trust... Thank you for time and space to sit back and listen - listen to other voices of perspective; examine other ways of seeing the same situation; hear where someone else is coming from even when they speak without love or care for us but from a wounded place...

Thank you for those who show grace to us and model for us how Sabbath can shape and grow life spiritually... Thank you for patience, for availability, for kindness, for honesty that is gracious rather than harsh... Thank you for healing in spirit that also spreads to the way we think, and the way we feel in all parts of our being...

May we continue to honour and protect Sabbath time, and may we use it to continue to grow in you and through you into all our being-in-relation... In Jesus' name... Amen.