

Mark 3: 1-6

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ²They watched 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.

Commentary: Again, Jesus is in conflict with the authorities over his apparent breaking of the Sabbath law. Jesus once again maintains that the purpose of the Sabbath or any religious law ought to be about serving and helping people rather than burdening them. In this passage, it becomes clear how legalistic the religious establishment has become. Jesus has just performed an outstanding miracle. He has healed a man who has been suffering for a long time. The religious leaders are completely oblivious to human need and compassion here. Their concern is to find fault with Jesus. Jesus cannot believe their 'hardness of heart.' It grieves him terribly.

Jesus actions remind me of all those emergency and healthcare professionals and others working on the frontlines in this season of covid-19. When they put the person first rather than strict rules for physical distancing, even when dealing with those who are sick and vulnerable, in care homes and elsewhere... Putting ourselves at risk for the sake of love and care, setting aside our personal agendas, our personal boundaries of our own comfort and moving beyond that because we are needed and God has called us... this is what it's about.

Questions: Do you hide behind rules in order to protect yourself from the demands of God for change in your life? Is your heart hardened before the human need around you? Are you resisting the divine call to set aside your agenda in order to listen to your heart and conscience?

Prayer: Lord God, it is difficult and sometimes overwhelming to face the demands placed on me. Even though I know that opening up my heart and following wherever you lead me is the path to life and wholeness, it is so much easier to protect myself from feeling the burden of the hurt, pain and need around me. It is hard not to feel resentful and judgemental. Soften my heart a little more, Lord God. Keep me from setting up rules and agendas as obstacles to your purposes for my life and the people around me. Thank you for all those who serve at great personal risk... Amen.