

**“Lord of the Sabbath” based on Mark 2:23 to 3:6 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15**  
**Delivered by Pastor Drew Mangione on June 2, 2024, at Shelby Presbyterian Church**

In our reading today, Jesus heals a man whose hand had withered. It had become unusable. In our modern culture, we may see this as less serious than it was. It could feel cosmetic. This man may work with his mind today. But in the ancient world, this would have likely left him out of work, entirely. He would have been struggling to get by and feed himself, or his family, if he had one.

With so many clamoring for work in manual labor, the person with one hand was automatically deemed less valuable than one with two. And yet, it is after this generous healing, that two sworn enemies – the Pharisees and the Herodians – team up to make a plan to kill Jesus.

Today’s gospel uses the Pharisees to challenge us on several fronts.

- First – Do we believe that Jesus is who he says that he is – fully human and fully divine?
- Second – Do we believe Jesus can do today what he did then – healing miracles?
- Third – How do we feel when Jesus challenges our notions of who’s in and who’s out, based on our own definitions of what is truly proper religious conduct?

You see, the Pharisees here are not in the story for us to view them as enemies or villains. They are in the story because they are us. They’re just like us today. They’re trying to make sense of ancient words and apply them in a changing world. They are concerned about the dignity of God if this Jesus claims to be God. They are concerned the miracles are not what they seem to be. They are concerned that what God’s scriptures say is being thrown out, discarded, by this one man who claims authority above everyone else.

On the first point, many struggle with doctrines like the Trinity and Jesus’s identity. Some scholars even argue that Jesus never makes the claim to divinity, especially not in Mark. But to do so, is to ignore the context of statements like calling himself “the Son of Man.” In fact, today’s reading presents the fourth and fifth of five consecutive arguments that all stem from the Pharisees heightened concern that Jesus has used a term from the book of Daniel that implies he is God.

You see the first conflict was when Jesus healed a man lowered through a roof by his friends. But Jesus did so to prove his authority to forgive sins. He asks, “Which is easier – to tell a person their sins are forgiven or to tell a man to pick up his mat and walk again?” He says this was done to show the Son of Man’s authority to forgive sins.

In our passage today, Jesus says the Son of Man is also the Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus claims he has authority over the Sabbath rest day which God instituted for the people. The Son of Man from Daniel was a figure that entered the throne of God. This was an image in Jewish mysticism. Imagine a giant chariot and God is in the chariot, but also anything in the chariot is one with God. The Son of Man figure rises up and stands in the chariot with God. This is what Jesus is saying: “This is the Godhead, and I’m part of that.” He says I am also Lord of the Sabbath.

He confirms what other Pharisees of his time period were already saying, but with authority. He says, the Sabbath indeed is made for humanity. Humans were not made for the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a rest given to a people brought out of slavery in Egypt. When they were there, they were never given time to rest, required to build without stopping. Now, God has not only pulled

them out of Egypt, but has said also, "Take a break. You can take that once a week. Please slow down. You don't have to live like that anymore."

But it's not just for them, but for everyone with them, whether rich and poor. It's for them, whether man or woman, free or enslaved. It's even for the citizen and the immigrant. Everyone gets to rest.

The man with the withered hand cannot rest. Even if he cannot work, it is not rest if his life is consumed with worry for his family or how he'll survive. How would you feel if you were in his shoes? Where is there rest when we are consumed with worry? So, then Jesus asks if it is allowable to save a life or to kill, to do good or to do evil.

Beloved, what Jesus does here is save this man's life, perhaps not from imminent death, but this miracle restores him in body and mind, freeing him to rest on that Sabbath. His healing empowers him to return to the workforce the following day. I believe this is what Jesus wants for us, too. We live in a world that takes so much. The world just takes and takes. We live busy lives with our jobs, youth sports, youth activities and many more things we get pulled to in our life – our extracurricular activities. Most of our time goes to worthy things – but are we restored by them?

I believe that Jesus has the power to heal – and continues to heal in our world today. I believe that Jesus works through the overworked hospital and medical staffs, and gives rest to those who are anxious for their loved ones. Yet, I know that healing sadly does not always come to the faithful. The faithful are often lost to disease and illness, untimely deaths and suffering.

In this story, what about the man who came the next week to that synagogue for healing of an injury or illness and Jesus wasn't there? Why does this happen? The prospect of healing gives us hope, and that's great, but it's frustrating when hope is not realized. I don't have an answer for this, but I know what I look to, namely why it matters so much to remember who Jesus is, because he lived as one of us.

Jesus knew loss and disappointment. He knew struggle and sadness. He had limits – the same limits as each of us. As the writer of Hebrews states, he had every weakness we have. This is what it means that the eternal Son, fully one with God, came down to us, to live as one of us, the Word made flesh to dwell among us. Then he died for us on a Roman cross. This cross was meant to inflict the most shame possible and there he died, only to rise again for us, bursting from the grave, And opening the door to eternal life for us.

I don't know why some are healed and some are not, but I trust in this: That our God is not distant, but truly is God with us, in the midst of our struggles. God in Jesus lived as we live and suffered for us. Now, because of him, when he ascended, we have the Holy Spirit in and among us. The Spirit lives in and among us, empowering us to work with God, and crying out from within us searching our hearts and advocating on our behalf when we don't have the words to pray. The Spirit groans and brings us into God's presence, by being present in and among us.

This brings us to the third question: How do we feel when Jesus challenges our own notions – our definitions of who's in and who's out and what is truly proper religious conduct? You see among the conflict stories leading up to today's reading, Jesus called a tax collector into his company. Then he ate with him and his friends. He brought people publicly identified as sinners into his inner

circle, without asking them to straighten up first. He offered forgiveness freely. The man he healed who was lowered through the roof didn't ask for forgiveness. Yet Jesus did it first. He led the way.

Beloved, our God pursues us with love. This doesn't mean whatever we do is ok. By no means. But it means that God seeks us out first. It will be God who guides us and leads us through the Holy Spirit. Don't doubt the Spirit. It blows where it wishes. Trust in God who shared in your life and see that it doesn't always work exactly the way we expect it too. God's grace is our Lord Jesus. God's Truth is our Lord Jesus. These are not in conflict.

As one of my favorite professors at Princeton Seminary, Clifford Black put it in his commentary on this, "When the Son of Man comes wielding authority on earth and lordship even over the Sabbath, lifelong assumptions cannot go unchallenged. The good news of God" amazes this world's 'nobodies' into glorifying God. It scares...society's stalwarts," because they are threatened by a "divine preacher who is so mysterious and infuriating."

Beloved, that is why we must proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope. The Lord of the Sabbath, who offers us rest in him. Amen.