

Mark 3 1-6

20th Jan 2021

May I speak in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Faith can be difficult to define. In today's gospel, we see the faith of the Pharisees in action. They watched Jesus to see whether He would cure on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. You couldn't make this up, could you? Have you read of some of Jesus' healing miracles and imagined yourself there, as the miracle is taking place? The rash on the leper turning to healthy flesh in front of your very eyes – the women who had been bent double for 18 years straightening up, as you gaze with amazement at the changes happening in her spine and the expression on her face. And here we have the Pharisees, who KNOW Jesus can and does heal, they must have witnessed several healing miracles and instead of being overwhelmed and giving God praise.... they want to accuse Jesus of law breaking to get Him into trouble with the Jewish authorities.

When we read of Jesus healing the sick, we are given very few details of the sick person, rarely even their name. Just last week we read about Peter's mother-in-law and even the person whose words we paraphrase at communion, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive You, only say the word and I shall be healed" we know only as 'the Centurion.' Which is Matthew 8, 8.

Now, we know the Pharisees were looking for a chance to destroy Him, and Jesus knew as well. This is the first incident we have of Jesus calling a sick person towards Him to be healed, we have Jesus asking a blind man "What do you want me to do for you?" which is Mark 10, 51; Jesus asks the man lying at the pool of Bethesda, "Do you want to be healed?" which is John 5 v 6. In the interests of equality, in Luke 13 v 2, Jesus calls forward the woman who was bent double and heals her on the Sabbath as well.

The man with the withered hand didn't ask to be healed. Why not?

Was he brought into the synagogue as a “plant” to trap Jesus, and was embarrassed to be the centre of attention? Was he born with an inherited condition, and had always used his withered hand, just a little differently? Did he have some work place accident when he was an adult, already married with children, and the alteration to his physical appearance was rendered irrelevant by his family’s loving support?

We know that the man obeyed Jesus and came to Him.

We know Jesus knew the hearts of the Pharisees and He was angry and grieved.

We know the man obeys Jesus a second time when He says “Stretch out your hand” – the man may have thought Jesus just wanted a closer look and was about to ask him about his medical history. It is in the man’s obedience to Jesus’ 4 word, 4 syllable instruction that he receives his healing and his hand is restored. The man very probably enjoyed a good stretch every morning when he woke up, he would certainly have stretched both his arms into his sleeves as he dressed each morning. There is no indication in the gospel that the man hesitated at all, that he said “Ahh, that hand can’t stretch, it’s withered, don’t you know?” The man simply obeyed Jesus command to do something so ordinary, so every day, something that he had done hundreds if not thousands of times before, but when he performed that tiny inconsequential action in obedience to Christ,,,,,,,,,,,,,his life changed forever.

Throughout the New Testament we read of people meeting Jesus and their lives are altered – the disciples, the sick, the five thousand and also there are many people who meet with Jesus and go away unchanged. The rich young man, whose name we do not know but his story appears in Matthew, Mark and Luke; the Pharisees in our reading today: and Pontius Pilate in John 18, v 38. We know Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever Hebrews 13, 8. It is us who are given the opportunity to change and be healed when we seek Jesus and obey His voice. He tells us” My yoke is easy and my

burden is light” in Matthew 11, v 30, and often we fail to realize HOW easy and HOW light, Psalm 103 v 14 tells us “For He knows our frame: He remembers that we are dust.” Now we may fear that we will be told to do something so difficult it’s beyond human achievement and we will then be punished for not doing it. That is not in the Bible, anywhere.

Let’s look at some of the instructions of Jesus:

“Cast your net on the right side of the ship” John 21, v 14.

“Take away the stone” John 11, v38

“Stretch out your hand” Mark 3, v 5

All simple and straight forward instructions. All easily done. Let us then come nearer to Jesus this year when other duties and activities have ceased, and let us humble ourselves to do the simple things, the routine tasks, in His Name and for His glory.

Amen.