

The Withered Hand Healing Part II and Anointing Service

Mark 3:1-12 by Patty Friesen (Mar. 18/18)

Visual: open hands, anointing oil.

Call to Worship: #157 Sing Story, Offering: 147 Sing Journey, Benediction: #156 Sing Journey
Sing, "Father I Stretch My Hands" #529 HWB after scripture and Healer of Our Every Ill #377
HWB during anointing

Three weeks ago I preached on the healing of the man with the withered hand with the social justice perspective of Mennonite relations to Jewish people. I finished that sermon before I left on my hot holiday in Herschel because I didn't want to work on it there but when one is on holiday with another minister like Lois Siemens, one ends up invariably talking about work and sermons and another sermon arose from the same healing text that I'd like to explore with a spiritual psychological perspective. It's amazing how many different ways God can speak through the same story. Part II of the Healing of the Withered Hand.

Most of the healing in Mark's gospel involves healing blindness and its' spiritual parallel - spiritual blindness. When Jesus heals people's physical sight, often their spiritual sight is restored too so they can see who Jesus is. The healing of the withered hand is different. What is the spiritual parallel to a withered hand? Commentators believed the man may have been a stone mason, a stone carpenter for the industry of Capernaum was the quarrying of stone for the palaces of King Herod in northern Palestine. This healing is about someone's ability to do their work, to fulfill their calling, to use their skills and vocation, to do what they can do for others.

It is also interesting that the injury is a withered hand that impacts touch, when Mark is obsessed with touch. He is very careful to describe in chapter 1 that Jesus stretched out his own hand to touch the unclean sickness of Peter's mother-in-law and the leper and the sick will in turn, stretch out their hands to touch him for healing. Jesus isn't made unclean by touching unclean people. The reverse is true - his hand in turn cleanses them. What is previously

considered unclean is now considered clean - much like Peter's vision in the book of Acts where a sheet lowers from heaven with all the unclean animals in it and God tells Peter to eat, but he says they are unclean. God responds by telling him, do not consider unclean what God has made clean - meaning that the previously unclean Gentiles are now considered clean and a part of the kingdom of God.

In the same way, Jesus challenges the religious laws of labelling people as unclean and separate from the rest of the community. It upsets the social dynamics of how people relate to each other as the sick and the healthy. Jesus' work is much more than physical healing. It restores members to each other in religious communities so they can worship together. It restores families to each other and restores people to their neighbourhoods and towns. It is a multi-layered, all-encompassing healing.

"By his wounds we are healed," scripture says. In Jesus' own struggles with exhaustion, anger, weakness and death, he identifies with what is withered in our lives. While the withered hand is a visible injury, most of our wounds are invisible. What needs healing in our inner lives so we can do our outer work, find the skills that God calls us to use to help others?

One of my spiritual disciplines is journaling, writing my way through thoughts and struggles and I have done this since high school. I have boxes of journals that Patrick is supposed to burn upon my death! Another spiritual discipline I have is reading back on my journals to see where God has brought some healing over the years or where I am just spinning my wheels. It is painful to read back on journals to observe all the spinning. For example,

"June 29, 1991: Ah, finally some quiet time to pause and reflect on my obsessive anxiousness. I become withered when I'm so focused on my inner chaos that I have no space for other people. Tomorrow is my 26th birthday. This year I resolve to live more fully, taking advantage of every opportunity to make deeper friendships and to enjoy God's creation more."

Last summer, June 2017, 26 years after that journal entry I found myself in a withered

obsessive anxious space again and needed to take time in God's creation and am working hard to deepen friendships that are supportive and healing.

Spiritual writer Henri Nouwen coined the term, Wounded Healers. By Jesus' woundedness and human vulnerability our wounds are healed. And by our wounds, we heal others. When we are in touch with what is painful in our past or current relationships, when we admit we've done wrong, when we wrestle or as Dr. Brene Brown says rumble with our difficulties, then our wounds don't just bleed out into our marriages and other relationships but can find some healing. And when we've found some healing, we can share a bit about our own withered hand, then believe me, someone else will identify with that withered hand and be relieved because they've believed all these years that they were the only one who thought that or felt that way and bore that burden alone. That is what wounded healers do - share their wounds so that others can find the courage to share theirs.

The most vivid pictures of wounded healers and healing hands I've ever witnessed was working at the Mennonite Nursing Home in Rosthern. And I experienced this again leading worship there last Sunday. Eddie grabbed my hand in a strong handshake that he didn't let go of as he told me how he was adjusting to life in long term care. Now hands at the nursing home are kind of scary and Eddie told me that he's been coughing for 5 years and I really wanted to get my hand back out of his handshake but hand to hand, we were connecting soul to soul.

When I worked at the Nursing Home, four years ago, I would observe that around the dinner table, a resident who couldn't talk would pass the salt to a resident who couldn't move and they would make eye contact and have a powerful moment of mutual aid and respect. That's what being a wounded healer is about. I've got my injury and you've got yours but my shaking hands will pass you the salt and somehow we will get through this meal together. It struck me also with regard to this shaking hands, that when these beloved elders would be near death, surrounded by family and breathing their last breaths - they would often reach out their shaky hands to something or Someone unseen. We would wonder who they were greeting with

open hands or being greeted by. I like to think their Wounded Healer was holding their hands and welcoming them home.

As Christ's wounds heal us, may our wounds heal others. I invite those who would like their hands anointed with oil and prayer for healing in our lives and in the work God has called us to, to come forward as George and I make the sign of the cross in our palms. We will sing #377 HWB Healer of Our Every Ill during this time.

Let us pray: Healing Christ, you desire wholeness for each of your children, broken as we are in body, mind and attitude. As we come before you, just as we are, you know us and love us more deeply than we know or love ourselves. Amen.

Anointing of Hands: May Jesus' touch heal our hands and hearts.