

*Untouched, unmoved, unhealed*

Our New Testament passage is a story that tells us about a healing by Jesus, as there are many in the bible. Victory over the illness that the man, who has come to Jesus in the synagogue, suffers. You may well have heard the story before.

As a minister, a lot of time is spend time with people who are ill. Although that is hard, it is can also have beautiful moments, moments when it is experienced that the strength of faith hasn't been drowned out by the strength of the illness, but is still there. That gives courage to keep doing what needs to be done.

However, there is one illness that doesn't allow for such moments. With this illness there is no suffering involved. With suffering comes vulnerability. But with this illness comes the opposite of vulnerability, which is protection, immunity

A concrete wall prevents people, who have this illness, from being touched, moved. Oh, they can agree with the words of faith, but they won't let themselves be affected by those same words. The seeds of those words fall on stone. The effects are safely and comfortably kept outside the wall. There is stubborn refusal to be changed by their faith. And so their solid ways are the ways that they keep

following. That God's ways are not theirs, doesn't register. As it says in Isaiah,

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the  
LORD.*

*<sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah  
55:8,9)*

It is that illness, apart from the illness that causes the hand of the man to be withered; it is that illness that is there in our New Testament reading too. It is the unobvious illness that it is unmasked by Jesus, through the obvious illness of the man with the withered hand.

You may prefer to see Jesus as a smiling, kind, soft Shepherd. But here we have an angry Jesus. The illness that is not seen by the people who are sitting in the synagogue, and whose eyes are fixed on Jesus and the man...the illness that is not seen by them, is seen by Jesus; is known by Him; felt by Him in the vulnerability of the man that stands before Him.. And Jesus is not going to ignore it.

God's Son knows that He is dealing with the illness of the hardness of heart of those who are watching Him. The Pharisees, they are watching Him to see how He is going to deal with this ill man.

For the fact is that it is the Sabbath day. So what follows from that fact is the big question: is Jesus going to do what is forbidden on the Sabbath, to do any work? Or is He, instead of obeying that rule, going to heal this man? It would be convenient if Jesus did, for them for that would justify their plan to eliminate Him. The Pharisees are keen; desperate for evidence to justify their ways, so ...what are You going to do Jesus?

Believers in God's rules. Extracting out of God's rules, God's heart. God's beating heart, from where Jesus came into the world, with a tiny beating heart of a baby.

All that is left out.

And so, from within the hardness of their heart, the sick man is used by them as a testcase.

When we hear the word circumcision, our immediate, natural reaction is that it's nothing to do with us. It's for the Jews. But this morning's story of Jesus and His battle against the hardheartedness of the believers in God's rules, shows that it is so relevant to all of us,

*'to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways,  
to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all  
your heart and with all your soul' (Deuteronomy  
10:12)*

to,' *Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.* <sup>17</sup> *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe*'. (Deuteronomy 10:16,17))

to, '*fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him*' (verse 20),

If we won't let our heart be circumcised by God; if we don't let it be available to its Giver, then the effect we have on Him, comes close to the effect the Pharisees have on Jesus. If we choose to have a kind of faith in Him that misses its purpose, in that it remains a cold, unreceptive faith, then we commit a sin.

For the meaning of sin in Hebrew is: 'missing its goal'.

And so we have two illnesses in our New Testament reading: the illness of the withered hand versus the illness of hardness of heart.

The withered hand is healed. The hardness of hearts of the Pharisees isn't.

All we can do, is pray for, hardened hearts, that they may be softened by the power of God's love, shown through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

And Jesus, representing God's very own heart?

*‘ He said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.”<sup>4</sup> And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?”(Mark 3:3,4)*

Silence.

The Pharisees give Jesus an ice cold look. That look vs Jesus’ look: His eyes are spitting fire of anger. Anger that comes from disappointment, deep hurt because hearts are not receptive to His Love. With these deep emotions, Jesus sees how they leave the synagogue with hearts that are ill...that remain ill, as they don’t allow for His healing.

As the Pharisees leave, they plan to get rid of Jesus. On the Sabbath, that was given by God to celebrate life, to rejoice healing.

There is only one thing left for Jesus. And that is to surrender to those stubborn, hardened hearts, to surrender to the evil that comes from hardened hearts. That is what we see when we see, when we feel something of His pain on the cross.

Evil, absorbed in Himself, making Him suffer, killing Him while He still says,

*“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)*

The cross. His last weapon. Will it break stone hearts? Or the parts of hearts that are as hard as

stone...? Will they remain untouched, unmoved, unhealed or do we dare expose the whole of our hearts to Him, in order to be healed by Him and so have life with and through Him...?

That is the big question with which you go home...and the answer...the answer is between Him and you

Amen