

SCRIPTURE READING FOR JANUARY 29, 2023 @ CAPC OAKLAND

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Mark is one of the four gospels written to tell the life-story and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. It was most likely the first composed between AD 60 and 70, later used by Matthew and Luke. "In Mark 1:16-45 Jesus has battled with demons and disease, but his relationships with human beings have been remarkably harmonious. This changes in what we read last week in 2:1 through what we read today in 3:6. In this section Jesus finds himself constantly in conflict with the Jewish religious leaders, the scribes, and members of the sect of the Pharisees."^{*}

withered hand :: the word here indicates that the man's hand was paralyzed, no longer functioning.

whether he would cure him on the Sabbath :: remember that the Sabbath – the 7th day of the week (Saturday) was a day of rest and holy contemplation or worship. Commanded in Exodus 20:8-11, it was the defining aspect of the Jewish culture and faith. Only they took one day off of work a week. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

so that they might accuse him:: According to the Scripture law deliberately breaking the Sabbath law carried the death penalty. The Mishnah (other Jewish writing that gives out more detail to the parameters of the laws of the Torah) says that you must warn the transgressor by two witnesses, and then only if the breaking of the Sabbath continues, is that person executed. This is in Exodus 31:14-15 -- "14 You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people. 15 Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death." and also in Number 15:32-36 -- "32 When the Israelites were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. 33 Those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses, Aaron, and the whole congregation. 34 They put him in custody because it was not clear what should be done to him. 35 Then the Lord said to Moses, "The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him outside the camp." 36 The whole congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death, just as the Lord had commanded Moses."

^{*} Notes taken from Mark 1-8 The Anchor Bible Commentary Series by Joel Marcus.

Mark 3:1-6

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

¹ Again Jesus entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a *withered hand*. ² They were watching him to see *whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him*. ³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." ⁴ Then 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. ⁵ He 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. ⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

⁷ Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; ⁸ hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. ⁹ He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him, ¹⁰ for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. ¹¹ Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" ¹² But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- We're told that the "they" – the opponents of Jesus – are setting this whole scene up to catch him breaking the law in the hopes of embarrassing or arresting him. Jesus says that they have hard (or rebellious) hearts. How do they treat the man with the withered hand in all of it? How do they see him as a human being and brother?
- The Sabbath was given as the seventh commandment to remind the people of who God is and who God had made them to be. Remember this law about rest for a whole day being holy was given to a people who had just been liberated from slavery in Pharaoh's Egypt. How is Jesus right in his interpretation? How might the Pharisees be correct? What's more important following the letter (literal interpretation) or the spirit (the essence underneath it) of the Law? Why?
- What gets lost in this story? What is gained? How do we endure those same losses and gains in how we treat other people?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?

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they were silent :: Jesus has silenced his opponents with his question, stumping them, making them look bad in public for their lack of understanding, willingness to answer, or inhumane use of this differently-abled man to make a point. Their humiliated when they were trying to look their best in front of the people.

Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" :: It was good reasoning of the Rabbis to say that "saving life overrides the Sabbath law". If someone's life is in danger, the Sabbath laws may and indeed must be broken to rescue him or her. This began during the Maccabean Revolt and war with the Greek when pious Jews who refused to defend themselves on the sabbath were slaughtered by the Syrians. By Jesus' day it applied to all illnesses in which there was even a slight chance that death might be result. In today's encounter however, the man's life is not threatened, and according to both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mishnah, diseases that are not life-threatening should not be treated on the sabbath.

We see a similar confrontation and wrestling with the meaning of the Sabbath Law in Luke 13:10-17 --
"¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." ¹³ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴ But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured and not on the Sabbath day." ¹⁵ But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water? ¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" ¹⁷ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame, and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him."

hardness of heart :: this is an expression used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and in the gospels to talk of those who are rebellious, or stubborn, who refuse to listen and obey God's teachings, or refuse to listen to Jesus. Some examples are in : Isaiah 6:10; Zechariah 7:12; Jeremiah 5:23 & 11:8; Psalm 17:10, 73:7, 119:70