

He said to them, if any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep? Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Then he said to the man, stretch out your hand.

So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. So we don't know the man's name, and we don't know why he has a withered or shriveled hand. That's where it's interesting to me, the three different writers. Luke, who is a doctor, says it's the man's right hand.

The man is disabled. He's got a disability. And that was a huge stigma in the first century. Some considered disability a curse or a sign of sin. If you read John, chapter 9, Jesus and His disciples are walking along and they come upon a man who was born blind.

And the disciples just ask an innocent question, say, rabbi, who sinned? The man or his parents, that he was born blind? And Jesus said, neither one. Neither one. So this man with the withered hand no doubt encountered hardship because of his hand, and he probably couldn't work.

Disabled people were excluded. They were marginalized, they were pushed aside. It was a stigma. It was a huge stigma. And so he was one of those people.

One of those people. And it was something I think he tried to hide. I think he was probably ashamed of it. My imagination. I once knew a person.

I'm going to use they instead of he or she, this person had a deformed hand, and they were a master at hiding it. They would wear certain kinds of clothes. They would be careful in their movements, and you really didn't notice it until you did. And I think our man with the withered hand is a lot like that. I think he was probably a master at trying to hide it.

He would probably wear certain kinds of clothes. He probably had a long flowing robe. And he goes to church this day. And I think he's probably just minding his own business. He wants to worship, he wants to pray.

And then, to his horror, the Pharisees decide to make him a test case for Jesus. They don't care about the man. They just want to trap Jesus. And so Jesus, Mark says, is angry. It really ticks him off that they're using this guy and challenging Jesus in this way.

Luke says that Jesus tells the man to stand up, come up front, come up here. Come up here. So Jesus then asked the Pharisees a couple of questions about whether it is right to do good on the Sabbath or withhold compassion. But can you imagine this poor guy who's been trying to hide his hand? Now it's on the front of everybody.

He's probably just mortified with embarrassment. And so the Pharisees cannot answer the questions of Jesus because it would condemn themselves if they did. So they say nothing. So Jesus then asked the man with the withered hand to do the unthinkable in front of everybody. He says, stretch out your hand.

Jesus, mighty will, said, show us your stigma. Show us your shame.

And as the man with the withered hand obeys the words of Jesus, he's healed, his shame is gone. Suddenly his stigma has turned into a stigmata, a sign of God's love, acceptance, and healing. John Ortberg, in a wonderful book called Steps, and if you read this would be a good one, he talks about the fellowship of withered hands. And it's based on our story today, and it's associated often with Alcoholics Anonymous. The fellowship of the withered hand is used to describe a community of people whose pain, whose brokenness, whose shame are no longer hidden.

These things have been stretched out to Jesus and to each other. They have been healed. The stigma is gone. The stigma has turned into a stigmata. The disgrace has turned into a sign of grace, forgiveness, and redemption.

So what about us?

Is there anything hidden for fear of being stigmatized? Is there something you just don't want anybody to know, but it's holding you back? Most of us have something we would rather keep hidden. There's spiritual deformities that we don't really want anybody to see. But it's holding us back.

And we hide them in robes, various robes. Disguise. But what if Jesus says, and he is, stretch out your hand. Stretch it out not as a way of shaming, but as a way of healing? He already knows about it, and he wants to turn our disgrace into a sign of his grace.

Step one of regeneration, which we're piloting at Bloomington and all recovery programs, is admitting, admitting that we have withered hands and we can't fix them. So step one is we admit we are powerless over our addictions, brokenness, and sinful patterns, that in our own power, our lives are unmanageable. And so we get to the point that we stretch out our hand to Jesus and say, I can't do this. I can't fix this. Help me.

Heal me. So who needs to stretch out their hands. Well, those people. People with stigmas, right? The attic, the prodigal son in the pigpen.

Who needs to stretch out their hands? People pleasers. People trying to fake it till they make it.

People who are insecure and unsure. Those us with too much pride, so much to hide.

I am one of those people. I am one of those people. Most of us are. So we just need to stretch out our hands to Jesus, admitting that we can't live without Him. We can't function without his grace.

Stretch it out before Jesus. He loves you. He knows about it already. And he wants to change your stigma into a stigmata. He wants to change your disgrace into a sign of his grace.

Don't you imagine that this guy that was healed that day never stopped telling that story? He would say, I have never been so mortified in my life as when he said, stand up and come up here.

It was the worst day of my life. Until it wasn't. Until it became the best day of my life. Because he made me stretch out my shame and my hand. And he healed it.

He healed it.

Many years ago, I read Henri Nouwen's the Wounded Healer, and I use that language a lot. He says, a wounded healer has admitted brokenness and the inability to. To heal withered hands. And so a wounded healer has stretched out her hand and allowed Jesus to heal it. And now, with a healed hand, the wounded healer with nothing to hide comes alongside others with withered hands and says, hey, I know how to fix this.

I know who can fix this. CS Lewis says that true friendship begins when somebody with vulnerability shares something pretty deep with another person. And the other person hears it and says, you too? I thought I was the only one. The other night in our regeneration group in the men's section, there was a guy.

We were talking about confession, and we. We confessed pretty hard in our men's group. And he said, I don't think I could ever confess some of these things to some of my friends because they would judge me and reject me. Most of us pushed back on him and said, no, I don't think so. I think they would say, yeah, man, I understand.

I've got the same issues, got the same problems. Wounded healers have nothing to hide. They don't celebrate their flaws. That's not what it's about.

Rather, they celebrate that God has healed them. This is where I'm weak, and this is where he is strong. He has healed me. He can do the same for you. Jesus doesn't shame us for a brokenness.

He Heals it. The man with the Withered Hand didn't earn his healing. He simply stretched out his hand in obedience.

We all have withered places. We all have hidden shame. We all have secret sin. We all have wounds. And Jesus says, stretch him out.

Stretch them out to me. Let me see him. He does it not to expose us, but to heal us. And it happens when we admit we are powerless.

As I've said, I'm going through the 12 steps, piloting a group in Bloomington on Tuesday nights, and we've been doing it since late August. And I have to tell you, it's. It's transformative for me. I've admitted and confessed things that I guess I knew but had to, had to see for myself about me and share with other people and stretched out my hand, and it's still a journey. But, man, it's so liberating.

It's so good. What a difference it makes. We want this church to be a church of the fellowship of the withered hand, a place where honesty and transparency are always present. And I think in many ways, we are, thanks to Tim. Tim says things.

I go, I can't believe you said that.

But seriously, Tim is pretty transparent, very honest. And I think that creates a culture that's very much a part of this church where we can learn to just be a little more. A little more honest, a little more transparent about our struggles. Not just to wallow in shame, but to be liberated from it, to find community, to find support, to keep going. The Fellowship of the Withered Hand is a community of wounded healers.

We're not people who have it all together, but we're people who admit that healing begins the moment we stop hiding, admit we are powerless, and start stretching and confessing that we just can't fix ourselves first. John 1:9 says, if we confess our sins, he, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. So we confess our sins to God. But there's also a horizontal aspect that's very important. James 5 says, Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. You know, at the cross, Jesus took our stigma, he took our guilt, he took our shame, he took our sin and he bore it in his body. His wounds became our healing. So in just a moment, we're going to take communion. And when we take the bread and when we take the cup, we remember that our hope and healing are found in him alone.

He had to die for our sins, but he was glad to die for our sins. We cannot heal ourselves, so he stretched out his hands on the cross, showing us how much he loves us. And now he invites us to stretch out our hands to him. So as you receive communion today, hear the invitation. Stretch out your hand.

Just go ahead, stretch out your hand. Bring your brokenness, bring your knees, bring your powerlessness and receive grace. We take communion together because we are a fellowship, a community of withered hands that have been healed and need additional healing. So let me pray. God, thank you for this opportunity to commune.

Boy, what a wonderful thing it is that goes all the way back to Egypt and the Passover, where the blood of the lamb and unleavened bread are signs of your deliverance. And so today, as we take the bread and drink the juice, we're reminded of our brokenness and our inability to heal ourselves. We're thankful that Jesus stretched out his arms on the cross so that we can stretch out our arms to Him. So thank you. In Jesus name, amen.

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