

This is the last story from Mark's 'Conflict Group' and is the 'final straw' that leads to the plot to kill Jesus. It makes the point that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, a highly revered institution of Judaism. As is the pattern in Mark, Jesus seems to understand the minds of the accusers and takes the initiative with the questioning as well as with the healing.

Healing was normally permitted on the Sabbath if there was immediate danger to life, but this healing would not have come under this category. However, it did come under the category of 'doing good.'

Note the anger of Jesus directed towards unfeeling legalism. "In the name of piety they had become insensitive to the purposes of God and the suffering of men." (W.Lane. The Gospel of Mark. 1974. P 124) Who are the Herodians? There is little known about them, but it is assumed that they were sympathizers to Herod's rule, and their alliance with the Pharisees would have been a tenuous one. See the previous notes about Sabbath and Pharisees.

A non-Biblical source (the Gospel according to the Hebrews) tells us that the man in our story was a stone mason who had injured his hand at work.

The sermon makes something of the religious setting of the story. It happened on the Sabbath, in the synagogue, in the presence of religious leaders.

1. Have you ever been asked to do something that stretched you beyond what you had ever done before?
2. **Read Mark 3:1-6**
Note the place, the time and the people who were there.
Do you see anything ironic about all of this?

See the comment above about the religious setting.

3. **Conflict can be caused by differing religions or different attitudes to faith.**
 - a. What have you read about such conflict in history?
 - b. Have you ever experienced conflict like this?
 - c. Have you ever caused it?
 - d. Has anybody in the group experienced misunderstanding and conflict when they changed churches?
 - e. Has conflict caused anybody to change churches?
4. **Reactions of the Pharisees.**
 - a. In what ways are the Pharisees feeling, seeing and reacting in this story?
 - b. How does their reaction differ to the way Jesus reacted?

The Pharisees are watching the incident through the eyes of the law. They are not seeing the needs of the victim but rather the needs of tradition. Not only do they see the problem of the law, but their eyes are also on the behaviour of Jesus rather than the needs of the victim.

5. **The following are instances when law and compassion sometimes clash. What would you do in these cases?**
 - a. Your elderly mother, dying a painful death, begs you to arrange a lethal overdose.
 - b. Your 14 year old daughter is raped and becomes pregnant.
 - c. You believe in nonviolence but an intruder breaks into your home and threatens your family.
 - d. You are a minister who does not believe in infant baptism. You are called to a hospital where one of your new worshippers has had a miscarriage. You are asked to baptize the foetus.

6. Why didn't Jesus simply heal the man?
Why do you think he asked him to stretch out his hand?

The sermon is based partially around this issue, as is the opening question. It is presumed that Jesus wants the victim to participate in his healing.

7. **Reflect on the answers given to the opening question.**
 - a. What else could Jesus call you to do that may involve stretching yourself beyond your present capacity?
 - b. Have you seen people grow in areas because God has called them to "stretch" themselves?
8. **People left the synagogue with different emotions and feelings.**
 - a. How would the paralysed man have felt?
 - b. In what ways would he "never be the same" after this encounter?
 - c. What do we know about the feelings of the Pharisees?
 - d. What about the feelings of Jesus? What clues are we given about his emotions?

Note the anger of Jesus that is directed towards a group of people who are tied up in their legalism. Their failure to see the needs of people is probably the cause of the response of anger.

9. **Do you ever leave a church service feeling:**
 - a. Stretched?
 - b. Healed?
 - c. Angry?
 - d. Just the same as when you came in?
10.
 - a. What does this story say to us personally?
 - b. What does it tell us about Jesus?
 - c. What is one thing we should now do because of this encounter?