

THE WITHERED HAND RESTORED

Luke 6: 6-10; 10:1, 2, 9

I was there, witnessed the miracle.
Even now I can scarce believe what my eyes saw,
What I now know.
But it was my best friend who was healed.
And it has changed our lives for ever.
Would *you* be willing to take a risk, listen to what I have witnessed and believe what happened to us both?

We'd been friends since childhood.
He'd never fussed about his disability, -
His right hand, (why did it have to be his right hand?), severely withered,
Utterly useless.
But it didn't stop us playing games, running ragged and breathless up and down the hills, laughing and forgetful
of any limitations.
Yet there were other times his natural compensation could not cope,
And I'd be there, or his parents, to help.
I loved him for his joy, his lack of self-pity.
I sometimes felt he was more of a man than me.....
I'd often wondered why he had been so afflicted.
His life had been blameless, - indeed so much better than mine.
His parents as far as I'd known them had always been good.
Perhaps a distant ancestor had done wrong.
It seemed a harsh thing for him to suffer, - especially as there was no
possible release.
There was no way out, no healing, no hope.
What sin must have caused that?
It seemed so unfair.
Why did so many people have to suffer with illness or misfortune?
Living lives of acceptance and just managing.
Yet the paradoxical question:
How is it that the sick and so- called disabled often seem so much better, more alive, than we?



That Sabbath we'd met and entered the synagogue together as usual.
There was a lot more interest and buzz about the place that day.
Jesus of Nazareth had been invited to address us.
We'd both heard about him, - some talk or remark about him being the Messiah or Christ, - but so unlikely, -
Nazareth was only a village and that not many miles away, and by what little we had heard he was no more than
a carpenter by trade. Still, there must be something about him to have created an interest.
The Pharisees and scribes knew that we would be there, but that day when we arrived there were nudges and
knowing looks.
One of them asked us to sit at the front.
We chatted for a bit. A fly tried to settle on my friend's face. He brushed at it with his withered hand.
I felt compassion for him, - his handsome looks marred by this senseless deformity.

The service began and went through its normal routines.
The time came for anyone to stand and speak.



From the back a man stepped forward.
He had an air of authority that commanded attention,
His seamless white robe somehow a symbol of his natural stature.
This had to be Jesus of Nazareth.
I suddenly realised it didn't matter what village he came from.
He came from God.
As he took his place his love seemed to shine and when he spoke, that same love
permeated everything he said. The scriptures became alive, meaningful.
I'd always thought that the kingdom of God was something to come,
Some far-off event, powerful, as a result of mighty battles, with a great commander
to the fore.

But this kingdom was altogether different, stronger, immediate, grounded in love.
I glanced at my friend. He too was watching enthralled, - his eyes shining, accepting every word spoken.
They were fine words indeed, - but was that it?
Comforting, but without proof, fine words were all they were.

I suddenly thought what if he did prove them true? How would he? What evidence would I want? How would anyone prove the kingdom of God here and now?

“Rise up and stand forth in the midst.”

In the sudden bewilderment of being brought back into the present I thought for a moment Jesus was talking to me. But no.

My friend levered himself up and stood alone in front of Jesus.

There was a stillness, an expectancy borne of his undoubted authority.

He turned to the Scribes and Pharisees.

I could see them shifting uncomfortably. It was as though he had read their thoughts and they knew that he knew what they were thinking, and in some way those thoughts would be exposed.

He spoke to them directly:

“I will ask of you one thing”

He paused a second, but that pause seemed to contain a lifetime of moment.

“Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?”

He looked round at each of them in turn, the silence and expectancy deafening.

We all knew what was going to happen.

I looked again at my friend.

“Stretch forth thine hand.”

I said I was a witness.

But how can you own up to seeing the impossible.

He obeyed Christ’s command.

Not "Stretch forth thine withered hand", but "stretch for thine hand as God gave thee".

His arm extended, fingers uncurling, filling out fully formed.

We all looked at one another, knowing it was happening yet still disbelieving.

My friend’s face shone as his hand was restored whole as the other.

He knelt before Jesus, giving thanks amidst his awe and wonder.

Then turned to me and shouted my name.

Leaping forward his hand outstretched to take mine,

Right hand to right hand.

What mixed emotions I had! Joy for my friend, but shamedly half frightened to grasp what may have been only illusion.

His handshake was firm, firmer than mine.

And then I responded truly. Grip to grip, laughing and praising with him in the midst of the synagogue.

No dream but reality, but dear God how?!

I’d asked for proof, and here it was! The only proof possible!

No wonder the scribes were scowling! Here was true authority! No longer mere words, but the consciousness of God’s kingdom here and now seen in health and completeness. Faced with full health, sickness had become impossible! Health the reality and sickness the dispellable illusion. This was the uncomfortable but wonderful import of what Jesus had been saying and had now proved! Yes, proved! - How else can you explain what had happened! And yes, I’ve seen similar things happen so many times since. I have had my own healings.

Let me hold you by your hand in that same love that Jesus is living. Our lives have changed so much for the better! This was not just a one-off miracle of some prophet, a magician’s trick. It was the coming of the Christ. The recognition of Love, God’s love for you and me, all-embracing. The true “Our Father” of which Jesus spoke and commanded us to pray, lifting our thoughts above human heredity to our true and guiltless origin, that we are even now the sons of the one God, the sons of Love! It’s the only explanation I can understand.

Don’t just accept my word, look, - here comes my friend, let him say it, prove it to you. Let him hold you firmly with both hands, with his love, confirm what I am telling you. Rejoice with us in the *now* of the kingdom of God. Jesus has sent us, is even now on his way. Jesus is telling everyone about what the TRUTH is, and he’s proving it all the time: God’s love for us is timeless and unconditional.

So that’s the real point I’m trying to make and so much want to share: the Christ is already here, with us even now, has always been here, will ever be with us all! Can’t you *feel* it? Dear friend, you just have!

