

# OSJ



Office of Social Justice



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## STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND - EMILY COLLEDGE

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### **Luke 6:1-11**

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

Jesus answered them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” Then Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Get up and stand in front of everyone.” So he got up and stood there.

Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”

He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He did so, and his hand was completely restored. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

### INTRODUCTION

I currently live in an intentional community house with five college students. I am the house mentor. Some days I am a guide and teacher in the house, but most days I am a student of everyday life along with my housemates. We have teachable moments in the kitchen quite often.

Recently, we had a teachable moment about loading the dishwasher. I explained that we cannot put spoons with globs of peanut butter on them in the dishwasher and expect the spoons to get clean. Our dishwasher is old and experience is showing us it's not working.

Each time I unload the dishwasher there's always one spoon that I pull out that still has peanut butter on it. After the fifth time I was starting to get angry at the mysterious peanut butter spoon culprit. It's so simple—rinse the peanut butter off the spoon (or better yet, lick it off the spoon) and then put it in the dishwasher. I keep thinking, “Why is that so hard?” And “Who keeps doing this?” and “Why are they not doing it the right way?” “There is a right way to do this, isn't there?” Maybe. Maybe not. I am learning that in these moments it is not always that easy to figure out the “right” way.

Life in relationship with the Triune God is full of teachable moments. In these moments we are learning, relearning and unlearning. Maybe there is something from the past that we need to learn from. Or maybe there is something new and radical that we need to learn now for the future. A teachable moment can also leave us frustrated, confused, or bitter. Sometimes we do not want to learn the lesson that we really need to because of stubbornness or pride or fear.

We get caught in the controversy of our hearts and our world. But here in these moments, God is offering rest and grace and an outstretched hand.

Jesus knows the controversy. He is beginning his public ministry. Some of the first things he does, he confronts demons. He gathers disciples. He heals the sick and broken. He announces that the kingdom of God is here. And he makes a pronouncement about who he is: the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus and his disciples spend time together—walking, talking, eating, getting to know each other. The sun is shining and the sky is clear. It's a beautiful Sabbath day to go for a walk together. Jesus and his disciples go out to the grainfields. It should be quiet and peaceful there since no one is working. They are in no hurry and linger in one part of the field. There is warmth in the air and warmth in their hearts. They realize they have forgotten to pack snacks for the journey. But, since Jesus is with them, their needs are taken care of. He provides food and rest. A gentle breeze blows through the field and the disciples can smell the fresh grain. It is a field of golden deliciousness. The grain is perfect to eat raw at that time of year. The owner of the field has kept with the farmer's law of hospitality and left sections of the field intentionally ready for sojourners and travelers to glean and go.

Soon, though, they realize they are not alone. Alas, the Pharisees are there. They notice Jesus and his band of brothers from a distance and hurry over. They are suspicious, and the scowl on their faces shows their disapproval immediately. Even though it is early in Jesus' ministry, they are ready to shut him down. It does not take very long for controversy to arise between Jesus and the Pharisees.

"Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" The Pharisees want an answer. "We are the religious leaders and teachers of the day. We know the Law, don't you?" They challenge Jesus. The Pharisees know the laws. They have traditions and expectations. They seem sure to know the right way. Jesus is not doing what they want him to do. With Jesus, a new order, a new kingdom is being ushered in. Religiosity has hardened hearts and clouded vision, making it hard to see Jesus. They want an answer and this is the answer they receive: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

On another Sabbath day, Jesus is in the synagogue, in Pharisee territory. Once again there is controversy and the Pharisees are looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, this time for healing on the Sabbath. Jesus knows what they are thinking. He knows. Jesus knows.

This time Jesus wants an answer: "Which is lawful on the Sabbath—to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" Silence. Jesus looks around at them all. Some look down at their feet. Some burn with anger but will not say a thing. Ugh! Who does this Jesus think he is? The Pharisees know the Law. But so does Jesus.

The man with the shriveled hand is there standing in front of everyone. Obediently standing. Waiting. Won't someone speak on his behalf? Choose to do good, choose to save life. No answer. No answer from the religious leaders of the day. There is controversy in their hearts. Silence. "Stretch out your hand," Jesus says to the man with the shriveled hand. Stretch. Out. Your. Hand. Completely restored.

The Lord of the Sabbath is also the Lord of Grace. God does not leave him there crippled and alone. He comes to him and he restores.

The crippling effects of sin, hardened hearts, and stubbornness are still present in the world today. Systems of power continue to oppress people. There is controversy in the world and in our hearts, between God's ways and our ways. There is real struggle—to know what is lawful and just, and to know how to go about being followers of Jesus. The Lord of Grace is needed to completely restore.

A few months ago, I traveled to the U.S./Mexico border with a team of pastors and seminarians. The hope was to learn more about the real struggle of immigration here in the U.S. and around the world. On the first night we traveled from the Tucson airport to the border town of Douglas, Arizona. After a couple hours, we approached "The Wall"—a looming, ominous structure, spanning miles and miles, about 20 feet tall. It looks like giant, rusty, thick prison bars and it is what the U.S. has built to keep people in or out. It was quiet in the van. We drove slowly along the wall. The sun was setting over the desert and sunbeams burst forth through the clouds.

We stopped at Boundary Marker 83 and got out of the van. As we were about to pray, we saw in the distance two young people running through the desert toward the hills. They had gotten through a part of the wall, somehow, some way, and were now running from Mexico trying to find shelter and safety in the U.S.

Our group stood in silence and in awe.

I found myself rooting for the couple, wanting them to make it through and not get caught.

There was controversy in my heart.

It was a while before anyone could speak.

"What is going to happen to them?" someone finally asked.

Our guide said, "Just wait and watch."

Within minutes, border patrol agents on four-wheelers came out of nowhere to apprehend the young people. They were caught and taken to a border patrol van. They would be taken to a center for questioning. They would have a long night ahead of them.

I am learning about immigration policies and what the laws say. But I also wanted those young people to make it through to the other side. I do not know what they were running from and running toward, but I wanted them to be free and to experience rest and grace. There is controversy in my heart and in this world. God's radical hope, healing, and complete restoration are desperately needed. We desperately need the Son of Man to come liberate us and be the Lord of our lives.

God offers freedom and grace to all who will listen and believe. Like the man with the shriveled hand. He is there, listening and watching. Suddenly, he hears Jesus.

"Get up, stand in front of everyone."

The man obeys immediately and is up on his feet, standing there in the synagogue in front of everyone. All eyes fixed on the man and Jesus.

Jesus wants to know what's lawful—to do good or evil, to save life or destroy it? This question silences them all. Stretch out your hand. Once again the man is obedient and immediately stretches out his hand.

The Lord of Grace moves in the man's life and heals.

He can feel the tension released, a warm tingly sensation. There is feeling and movement. He wriggles his fingers. Completely restored.

The man can re-enter his community and can take up the work of his hands. Jesus gives this man new life. New life! He can be reunited to a rhythm of life that he was not able to partake in before.

The rhythms of life are restored and redeemed through the incarnation of Jesus. The law as the Pharisees knew it was coming to an end. A new kingdom, a new authority, a new way is being ushered in.

Jesus is liberator and healer. The death and resurrection of Jesus fulfills the law and brings us into the grace of God.

God is still offering healing and restoration today.

The Sabbath was created and made for us.

So, we would not be crippled by the controversy of our hearts or our world.

God knew what we would need, to keep us healed and restored.

Whether we've been following Jesus for a long time or since yesterday, we all need to be reminded that we have all fallen short and are in need of his grace and love.

You might need a word of encouragement and a reminder that whatever you're going through, Jesus is Lord. In our spheres of influence, our places of ministry (home, work, church, neighborhood, school) it is sometimes hard to trust and to experience God's freedom. There is hurt and longing and suffering in the world. If we could just stretch out our hand and know that God is there, stretching out his hand to us. He is there.

The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath and Lord of Grace and the Lord of life.

On that same trip to the U.S./Mexico border, that same night we saw the couple running across the desert, we also stopped at a portion of the wall where a prayer shrine had been made on the Mexico side. It was in memory of a young man who was shot and killed trying to climb over the wall.

As we listened to our guide tell the story, a car pulled up and a young couple with two children got out of the car to leave flowers at the spot. Our translator started a conversation with them. Our group was on the U.S. side and they were on the Mexico side, separated by the wall.

We learned that this was the family of the young man who was shot and killed. Once again, we were in awe and no one could speak. At just the time we stopped to pray, this family stopped to pray as well.

Our guide asked the family if we could pray together. And then, in a moment I will never forget, they stretched out their hands through the wall. We stretched out our hands and took each other's hands, through the wall, and prayed together.

Don't be afraid to listen, trust, and obey.

Stretch out your hand. The Lord of Grace is there to receive you. Amen.