Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

January 17, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“There was a man there with a withered hand” (Mark 3:1).

Heb 7:1-3, 15-17; *Mk 3:1-6*

The story of the healing of the man with the withered hand on the sabbath is one of several in which the word “stretch” is used. People, like the friends who carried their paralyzed friend up onto the roof to lower him to Jesus, were stretching to accomplish this. The crowds were constantly reaching out to touch Jesus when he passed by. When he encountered a leper, Jesus stretched out his hand to touch him, crossing a line that defined the leper as untouchable. Jesus stretched social protocols and moral limits by eating with public sinners.

There is an element of stretching in every miracle. Faith requires us to extend our trust beyond the safe limits of logic and social comfort, to expect something extraordinary.

Jesus praises those who initiate the encounters; they take the first step to reach out to him. The blind man on the side of the road lifts his voice and cries out. He keeps calling even when the crowd reproaches him. Zacchaeus climbs a tree just to see Jesus, hoping to catch his eye. The fishermen risk their predictable futures by following Jesus as disciples. His parables challenge our safe worlds of comfort and familiarity. New wine stretches the wineskins. We are invited to walk an extra mile, to take the next step, to expand our safe zones.

Every prayer requires us to stretch toward God. Jesus tells us to seek, ask and knock, all forms of stretching. Expressing our needs invites grace to enter our hearts, to stir up hope and begin the conversation with God that increases insight and courage. Friendship with God is the essence of prayer, the prize even greater than our actual request. We are already home if we are communicating with God.

The issue facing some of Jesus’ opponents in Mark’s account was that they could not open themselves to the possibility that he might be from God. No matter what he did, no matter how obvious the good that flowed from his words and his embrace of the sick and the poor, they had already made up their minds against him.

Can we stretch our imaginations to see Jesus at work in our lives? If we can, we are opening ourselves to his love today. If we are alert to his prompts and ready to act when even the smallest gesture of kindness or healing is possible, we are being stretched by the joy of the gospel.