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Since I am the newest on-call chaplain at Elkhart Hospital, when we chaplains gathered for our monthly staff meeting we played a game to get to know each other better. We had to tell two truths about ourselves and one lie, and the rest of the group had to determine which statement was not true. When it was my turn, I stated three things about myself:

- I taught courses at a university in the Old Testament, the Hebrew language, interfaith relations, and Religion in the U.S.
- In my younger years I enjoyed downhill ski competitions.
- My early experiences in hospital settings was as a clown named Rainbow when I would entertain children in the hospital.

Can you guess which statement is not true?

One of the chaplains said, “I can believe you taught in a university, and maybe that you were a clown, but that downhill racing story is quite a stretch to believe.”

Sometimes we hear stories that are quite a stretch to believe. For example, imagine a guy on a motorcycle coming through Elkhart who tells you, “I’ve left my family for six years to travel around the world on my motorcycle. In order to finance my trip, I offer extreme haircuts. I have cut hair on top of a live volcano, while paragliding 1000 feet off the ground, during a flood, in the desert, and underwater. Where would you like me to cut your hair?”

I imagine most of us might say, “That’s a bit of a stretch. I can’t believe you were able to cut hair underwater or flying in the air.”

But it’s true. Russian barber Denis Yushin calls himself the motobarber as he travels the globe offering extreme haircuts.<sup>1</sup> He seems to break the rules of barbershop practice as he cuts hair in the oddest of places.

I doubt that Jesus ever offered extreme haircuts, but he did offer extreme faith, for he engaged in practices that went against the norms of his religion. Just like the motobarber, he did

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unexpected things, some of which broke the rules, and when he did, Jesus got into trouble.

As Luke tells us, one day Jesus and a group of followers were walking through a field of wheat, picking off the tops of the wheat and rubbing them in their hands. By rubbing a grain of wheat, they would remove the outer husk, leaving behind the wheat bran, the tasty and nutritious part. Jesus and his followers were not stealing, for the practice of hospitality welcomed people into grain fields while traveling. Jesus and his followers were criticized for harvesting wheat on the Sabbath, on a day they were not supposed to do any work. The religious leaders accused them of working on the day God had appointed as a day of rest.

Jesus replied by reminding them of the time King David and his companions ate the bread in the temple that was reserved for the priests. It would be as if a very hungry person today ate the communion bread before worship. “What’s more important?” Jesus might ask us. “For you to have a small piece

of bread on Sunday morning to remember me, or to feed someone who has not eaten all weekend?”

That question might stretch our faith, pushing us toward extreme faith, but before we even get a chance to answer his question, Jesus stretches us even more as he encounters a man with a withered hand. The religious leaders were watching Jesus closely, hoping to catch him doing something wrong again—and he did! Jesus invited the man to stand up in front of everyone, and then he asked the crowd: “Is it legal on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save a life or destroy a life?”

How do you answer that question?

Jesus was asking a trick question, for the leaders knew they could not say the day was made for evil. If they said to do good, however, Jesus could heal the man on the Sabbath, but that would be considered work, a violation of the Sabbath law.

In the midst of their silence, Jesus said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” The man did so and discovered his hand was now healthy.

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I imagine some in the crowd of followers were amazed at Jesus' words and actions, but some may have been a bit cautious, wondering who this guy was that went against the norms, broke the rules and spoke out against the religious leaders. In the midst of the controversy, Luke tells us that Jesus looked at all the disciples following him, and he invited twelve to be his apostles. A *disciple* is one who learns from a teacher, but an *apostle* is one who lives the teachings, who trusts the teacher enough to be sent into the world to live out those teachings. It's one thing to say that I *believe* what Jesus teaches, but it's another thing to say I will *follow* what Jesus teaches.

Disciples preacher Fred Craddock told of a time he was preaching and someone decided to follow Jesus:

"I recall preaching in a university church in Norman, Oklahoma, some years ago, when a young woman came up after the service. I had preached on Mark 1, the call of the disciples. She came up and said she wanted to talk with me and said, "I'm in med school

here, and that sermon clinched what I've been struggling with for some time."

"What's that?"

"Dropping out of med school."

"What do you want to do that for?"

She said she was going to go work in the Rio Grande Valley. She said, "I believe that's what God wants me to do." She quit med school, went to the Rio Grande Valley, sleeps under a piece of tin in the back of a pickup truck, and teaches little children while their parents are out in the field. She dropped out of med school for this, and her folks back in Montana are saying, "What in the world happened?"

And I was saying to her, "Well, now, I was just preaching. I didn't mean to, you know."<sup>2</sup>

Being one who follows Jesus is not always an easy thing to do, is it? We may find ourselves in some situations that invite us to stretch out our hands to help those in need, though sometimes it's not always easy to know how to help. When someone asks for a bit of money, it's tempting to hand them the cash and think we've done a good

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thing, but handing out cash might support someone's unhealthy addiction or create a sense of expectation and lack of motivation to seek work. Sometimes the best way to help someone is getting to know the person, listening to his or her story, and not providing the easy solution. Sometimes we may get so frustrated with the unfairness of the world that we might complain to God, as was the case of a

young woman walking home from work when she saw a little girl standing on the street corner, begging. The little girl's clothes were paper thin and dirty, her matted and unclean, and her cheeks red from the cold.

The young woman dropped a few coins in the begging bowl, gave the girl a smile and walked on. As she walked she started to feel guilty. How could she go home to her warm house with its full pantry and well supplied

wardrobe while this little girl shivered on the street.

The young woman also began to feel angry, angry with God. She let her feeling be known in a prayer of protest. "God, how can you let these sorts of things happen? Why don't you do something to help this girl?"

And then, to her surprise God answered and said, "I did do something. I created you."<sup>3</sup>

God has created each one of us to do more than nod our heads and smile. God has called us to be more than disciples, but to be apostles, sent into the world to hear the stories of those seeking meaning, and to offer the hope and promise of what God is doing in the world. May you listen to someone's story, then stretch out your hand, and invite her to stretch out her hand and receive God's healing and blessing.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.odditycentral.com/news/thrill-seeking-hairdresser-leaves-family-behind-to-see-the-world-and-cut-hair-in-extreme-locations.html](http://www.odditycentral.com/news/thrill-seeking-hairdresser-leaves-family-behind-to-see-the-world-and-cut-hair-in-extreme-locations.html)

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<sup>2</sup> Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, 52.

<sup>3</sup><https://storiesforpreaching.com/category/sermonillustrations/discipleship/>

*Stretch Out Your Hand*  
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*Rev. Dr. Douglas Cripe*

*Luke 6:1-16*  
*Central Christian Church, Elkhart*