

Sermon - The Compassion of Christ

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Wrightsville Presbyterian Church, July 18, 2021

Ever since I started wrestling with this scripture, I've been puzzled. I've been puzzled about what gives us compassion. We see compassion in the faces around us. We see compassion in those who worship, in those who sing, in those who preach and in those who teach. We see compassion in the health care workers who have not taken a break from person-to-person care during Covid. We see compassion in the police officers who go to work every single day putting their lives on the lines to provide top-notch security. We see compassion in the volunteers in this body of Christ who give, who serve, who go the extra mile, who show passion with and for those in need. I've been puzzled about what

moves us. I've been puzzled about what gives us compassion and how we show that compassion.

In our scripture today we see Jesus the Christ showing massive amounts of compassion. Look! He shows compassion to his disciples after they returned from the mission field. He says, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for a while." He knows we need a break, a vacation, a time to put our feet up, a time to relax from our work and mission. He showed compassion to the great crowd and taught them many things, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He showed compassion by teaching, guiding, coaching, and mentoring. And we didn't read this portion, but do you remember what Jesus did after feeding the 5,000 men and countless others? He showed compassion to his disciples and made them get in a boat to Bethsaida and said, "I'll clean up the mess.

You go on ahead.” He was like a mother or a grandmother who did the dishes and took out the trash. Then Jesus showed compassion to himself and went up on a mountain to pray. Yes, he even modeled compassion for himself. Finally, when they all got to the land of Gennesaret, the massive crowds were there again, and Jesus showed compassion to them by letting them touch the fringe of his cloak and he healed them. Jesus, the Christ, the compassionate one, always shows compassion. Always suffers with us. That’s what compassion means you know? Compassion means to suffer with. Suffer with. Sit with. Endure pain with one another. So, I’m puzzled as to how to get this compassion. Am I called to suffer with others? Are you called to suffer with others? If so, how do we get it? Do we get it by looking at Jesus? Do we get it by being reminded that he not only suffers with us, but suffered FOR us, on the cross? Do we get this

compassion from our parents, our Sunday School teachers, our grandparents? How do we get compassion?

In 1994, hundreds of thousands in Rwanda were murdered in the space of weeks by soldiers and militias from a rival ethnic group. In response, the United States and much of the world largely shrugged. President Bill Clinton later called his administration's failure to act one of his great regrets. Puzzled by that apathy, a psychologist named Paul Slovic began conducting experiments to better understand people's reaction to mass suffering and death. What he found was troubling. In one study, his researchers showed people a picture of a 7-year-old girl dying of starvation and asked for donations to help her. He showed another group two starving children, then even larger sets of children. Slovic found people's distress didn't grow with the

number of children in danger, but often shrank. **“In fact, the more who die, sometimes the less we care,”** Slovic said in an interview. **The more who die, the less we care.** In greater numbers, death becomes impersonal, and people feel increasingly hopeless that their actions can have any effect. “Statistics are human beings with tears dried off,” Slovic said. “And that’s dangerous because we need tears to motivate us.” Interesting right? We need tears to motivate us. Facts don’t do it, tears and emotions and stories of real people motivate us.

You see why I’m puzzled? How do we get compassion? Where does it come from? I came across another story from Philip Yancey’s book, What’s so Amazing about Grace, that makes me squirm. Here’s Mr. Yancey’s quote: “I heard it from a friend who works with the down-and-out in Chicago: “A prostitute came to me in wretched straits,

homeless, sick, unable to buy food for her 2-year-old daughter. Through sobs and tears, she told me she had been renting out her 2-year-old daughter to men interested in kinky sex. She made more renting out her daughter for an hour than she could earn on her own in a night. She had to do it, she said, to support her drug habit. I could hardly bear hearing her sordid story. For one thing, it made me legally liable. I am required to report cases of child abuse. I had no idea what to say to this woman. At last, I asked if she had ever thought of going to a church for help. I will never forget the look of pure, naïve shock that crossed her face. 'Church!' she cried. 'Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse.'" What struck me about my friend's story is women much like this prostitute fled **toward Jesus**, not away from him. The worse a person felt about herself, the more likely she saw Jesus as a refuge. Has the church

lost that gift? Evidently, the down and out, who flocked to Jesus when he lived on earth, no longer feel welcome among his followers. What has happened?” (end quote). What does this do inside you? Does this make you squirm like it did for me? Does this fill you with compassion? Or guilt? Something else? How do we get compassion? How are we motivated to care?

Maybe this 2 minute video clip will fill you with compassion? **<show the Compassion video>**

Did that do it? Are you now more full of compassion for the hurting, starving, suffering people in the world? According to a book by McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, “Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep

with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, powerless with the powerless. Compassion means **full immersion in the condition of being human. Full immersion in the condition of being human.** When we look at compassion this way, it becomes clear that something more is involved than a general kindness or tenderheartedness. **It is not surprising that compassion, understood as suffering with, often evokes in us a deep resistance and even protest.**” Perhaps that’s why compassion is so hard to get or put on or get installed in us. None of us eagerly look forward to suffering and suffering with. So what about personal testimonies? What about hearing from your own Rick Schmidt, Ilean Ball, and Stephen Wisler at the Summer Feeding Program? Maybe that will give you compassion. **<let’s watch the video>**

Does that help you with compassion? Has God instilled that compassion in you from childhood? Is compassion something you've been teaching and modeling to your family? Maybe Jesus touched you with compassion through his Holy Spirit and like Ilean, it's one of your greatest gifts. Maybe the image of Christ suffering on the cross gives you compassion and makes you eager to carry your own cross. Only you know.

Now, there's one more 'two-part' reason I'm puzzled by this passage. Let me give you both parts of this and then share my puzzlement. First part, do you see what the crowds are doing at the end of this story? They're running and rushing to bring the sick to Jesus! They're showing compassion to their friends and family by bringing the sick ones TO Jesus. They're bringing people and putting them in the presence of the Lord.... And they get healed.

These crowds aren't doing the healing. They're simply bringing their sick family and friends TO Jesus. The second part comes from the story in the middle of our passages. In the feeding of the 5,000, when the disciples told Jesus to send the crowds away, Jesus said, "You give them something to eat." **You give them something to eat.** But then Jesus doesn't sit back and wait for that to happen. No, Jesus then took the 5 loaves and 2 fish that were available and multiplied them and fed the people **through his disciples. Through his disciples.** He used his disciples to distribute the food, to feed the people. **You give them something to eat. And they did, the food that Jesus provided.**

So, because I'm not real bright, I'm puzzled. Do we get and show compassion by feeding people? Do we get and show compassion by suffering with people? Or do we get and show compassion by

bringing people to Jesus? Or do we do a little of both? Maybe you can figure it out. Amen.