

Compassion

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I grew up in a time when the African Bible Study Method was new and quickly grew in popularity. The concept is to read scripture three times with the invitation to consider a different prompt with each turn.

The first hearing - What word or phrase catches my attention?

Second (wonder) - How does this passage touch my life today?

And then the third - Based on what I have heard (from others, from myself, and from the spirit), what does God want me to do or to be? (A sense of discernment..an active response to the world in God.)

I enclosed a copy of this method as an insert in the bulletin this morning so you might consider trying it out in your study of

scripture. *(For those of us worshiping online, a pdf can be found on the livestream page.)*

This structured, meditative model has tuned my ear to listen to scripture in the same way people mine for gold. Sifting through silt until the glimmer flashes before my eyes.

This week, the glimmer for me was the word “compassion.”

Something happened in my heart when I spoke that word aloud while sitting with this week’s passages. (Scripture can hit differently when read aloud. I recommend it.) As a person trying to be the best version of herself in this world, I am feeling compassion-starved right now. I wonder if you feel a bit of that too?

It makes me think about a quote commonly (and improperly attributed) to the popular writer and theologian C. S. Lewis. “You do not HAVE a soul. You ARE a soul. You HAVE a body.” As a

soul, I yearn for grace and compassion to grow around us. And this body that I have - it is a daily spiritual practice to keep its posture and presence open despite the growing tension I witness in the world (and experience within me).

A common refrain I say is, "Good Lord, Deliver Us." Mostly with humor in my voice and a slight shake of my head. Recently, I find myself actually calling out to God, "Good Lord, Deliver Us" because I am seeking a holy intercession on our behalf. What some of us of a certain age might say, "Calgon, take me away!" but we need more than just a few minutes in a bubble bath.

The Good News is that the power of Jesus is real. The movement of the spirit inspires me, and because of that, I see us in the Gospel today.

Mark's account of the energy and interest around Jesus made me consider his interaction with the crowds anew this week. Before

now, when I imagined the crowds around Jesus, I envisioned them as excited and seeking. High energy with hopeful expectations.

This week, something in Mark's words spoke of a desperate energy. A sense of frenzy. The crowded yet orderliness of my prior understanding fell away, and I imagined the crowds reaching out and grasping for any bit of Jesus they could take in. So in the face of paparazzi-style chasing that Jesus and the apostles were experiencing, it was particularly remarkable how Jesus could take a breath and offer compassion in their need - despite being exhausted... despite the need to continue his teaching of the apostles... despite just needing a break.

In our life and work, it is easy to confuse perceived distractions as nuisances when those distractions are the real work of being in community. Jesus knew what his work was. It was to love us.

Actually, it is not past tense but a very present reality. Jesus' work is to love us.

Through his words and presence, Jesus created a foundation and practiced the holy work of restoration. Jesus had compassion not because they were dumb “sheep” but because Jesus knew the way.

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.” This is the solid ground under our feet. The “rock of our salvation” as proclaimed in Psalm 89.

Another glimmer of compassion for me was named in the collect - “have compassion on our weakness... forgive our ignorance in asking... have mercy on the ways we are blind.”

Have mercy on the ways we are blind. Blinded by our own needs and ideas, just like David this morning in the book of Second

Samuel. He set out to create a glorious physical structure, a house of cedar, for God... and I imagine God gently putting a hand on God's forehead, taking in a deep breath, and lovingly telling David to "stay in his own lane" by essentially asking, "Have I ever asked for this? Haven't I always been with you, even in a tent? Don't you realize I don't need all this stuff? I just need you. Don't you see, David, I don't want you to build things... I want to build upon you a mighty people... Not a fancy place. I want the house we speak of to be about the people who will come after you... a complicated, problematic person... even on you can I build a great house. A line that leads directly to Jesus.

Have you ever worked hard on something and realized you were off the mark? Have you tried to build something when maybe God was inviting you to simply be? Have you spent time considering how your striving is more about you instead of the will of God? Filling our time with actions when all God is looking for is space. Space in our lives so that we can witness the beauty of

how each of us can be healed and restored by receiving a little compassion. I will be vulnerable enough to raise my hand and count myself in that camp.

So where do I place my hope when the frenzied crowds feel familiar, and the desperation rises in me? Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus calls me back. When speaking of Jesus, Paul writes, "He is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall..." that we might have a "new humanity in place of two."

The differences we build up, Christ breaks down. The unrest we can get swept up in is not louder than the peace he proclaims. His way, his truth, his life.

This past weekend, I had the opportunity to serve as a camp chaplain in New Jersey. During Compline (bedtime prayers), one of the readers (a young child) misread the phrase "I am the way,

the truth, and the LIGHT” and my immediate thought was “how beautiful” and I could feel the tears rise in me. A reminder to look for the light. We need the light.

His holiness, the Dalai Lama has spoken this bit of wisdom -
“Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Compassion is the radicalism of our time.”

Maybe being desperate for Jesus is a good place to be. A radical place. The crowds chasing him were onto something. They knew to go toward the light and life that Jesus was emanating.

In the clergy letter this week, I referenced a short portion of a Mary Oliver poem. I think it also speaks to the truth the crowd sensed in following Jesus.

“It is a serious thing
just to be alive

on this fresh morning

in the broken world.”

But it's the next line that gets me.

Oliver continues “I beg of you, do not walk by without pausing”

An online community, The Hive, started by a former associate rector, Hillary Raining, will often have jewels to consider along the spiritual path. When my week is busy, I can sometimes let them go by but this one kept flooding my feed, so I paused. It was titled, “Instructions on Living in a Broken World”

Lean into community

Seek out love

Applaud the good you see

Keep paying attention

Talk to your neighbors

Dance to the music and embrace art

Look for love and small joys

Take breaths and relish nourishing your body

Offer what you can

Linger at the dinner table

Check in with your people

Let yourself grieve

Love another as deeply as you can.

The storm is upon us, and we must hold on

Don't give up, we're here together.

Don't give up. We are here together.

Amen.