

The Compassion of Jesus

This summer we are spending time in the middle chapters of the Gospel of Luke. In June we will look at passages from Luke 7, 8, & 9. These chapters detail a set of **interesting events** during **the first year** or so of Jesus' ministry. What makes these events so interesting is that they were a set of **miracles** – that is interesting! And they were miracles to a **particular sort** of people!

As Luke 7 opens, we find that Jesus has **just completed his first preaching tour**, and he is now ministering out of his northern base in Capernaum in Galilee. Together Matthew and Luke list some of the highlights of the next weeks:

- He heals a **leper**
- and he heals a **Centurion's slave**.
- and he heals **Peter's mother-in-law**
- and he raises the **dead son of a widow** in Nain
- and he forgives a **sinful woman**

What would you say about a set of people like this? Some of these people had **remarkable faith**, like the leper and the centurion. Some of them had **no faith** at all that we can tell – like the dead boy or the mother of Peter who was probably comatose. A few of them were **insiders** – like Peter's mother in law – but most of them were **outsiders** – like a leper, or a gentile's slave, or a sinful woman, or a dead boy. No Jew would even touch people like that; they were **on the wrong side** of very real...

health boundaries or
moral boundaries or
religious boundaries or
racial boundaries

Just touching any one of them would make you **unclean!**

Yet **every one of them was helped** by Jesus. And right there we see

the gospel. It is not true that Jesus only helps those with great faith – even though he commends great faith. It's not true that he prefers the insiders. He seems to have **special concern for the outsiders.**

Actually, it seems that all that was needed to get Jesus' help was to get near him.

Think about this **mother of the dead boy** who we meet in Luke 7 today.

Soon afterward Jesus went with his disciples to the village of Nain, and a large crowd followed him. A funeral procession was coming out as he approached the village gate. The young man who had died was a widow's only son, and a large crowd from the village was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

Luke 7.11-13

Jesus is leading **a large, excited crowd** on a long walk in the rural part of Galilee. He had healed the centurion's slave some days earlier, and everyone wanted to get near him. He would have been teaching them as he walked along, and as they approached the village of Nain **another crowd** them met, a very different crowd.

They were part of a **funeral procession**, and they were **weeping** and wailing as they walked along to the burial place outside the town. They wept that day **because a boy had died**. His mother walked behind him in the funeral procession. These two crowds met each other and stopped.

We are told that **the Lord 'saw' her**. I think that is important. Because **he sees things that we often miss**. When he looked at her he 'saw' that

- A mother was burying her child. It is the **worst dream** of any father or mother – to bury a child. Jesus saw it, and it stopped him.
- And somehow he knew that this son was the **only child** of this mother; she had no other children.
- He saw, too, that this mother was walking alone. She was **a widow**. That means her son's funeral was **not her first funeral**. She had

also buried her husband. Her entire family had been lost to tragedy and death. It seems as though Jesus had a special heart for **an only parent losing an only child**. He knew what lay ahead of him in the years ahead.

- And he saw she **faced a tough future**. No husband, and no child – she faced a future without support, without a family, without the friendship and partnership and love she had once known.

'when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her' It does stir your compassion for people when you **see them caught** in things that are making life impossible. So he saw her brokenness and hopelessness as she came towards him. **She knew her life was over**. And **he knew** what she had **suffered** and what she **faced**.

But that is not all he saw. **He saw something else**. He saw something you and I often miss. He saw her **beauty**, her **dignity**, and her **value**. It was all there. It is **always still there** – even under the tears and the fear and the hopelessness. When he looked at people, he always saw something profound deep inside them, something of himself in them. We call this the **image of God**. He knew **where she had come from before she came from Nain**, **how** she was made, and **why** she was made and **by whom** she was made and **for whom** she was made.

He saw her **significance...** and he saw her **suffering**. God sees them **both**.

Oftentimes we get stuck when **we look** at people. We don't see very deeply. We get caught in superficial things. Surface things. How they dress. How they carry themselves. What they have done, where they live. How much like us they are, or are not. **Jesus sees deeper**. Nothing was hidden from him. There are **no secrets** before him.

He saw her significance and he saw her suffering. God sees them both. **That is where his compassion grows**.

In his compassion he walked up to her on that terrible day, and said, 'Do

not cry' – and **she just stood there**. That's all. This is not a story about her faith – she has none. Not about her prayer or piety. It's gone. She doesn't speak a word – all the pleadings have been poured out. She's empty and devastated beyond words.

Luke tells us that...

he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

Luke 7:14–15

I love the phrase, '*Jesus gave him to his mother.*' Jesus loves to **find lost sons and daughters, dead sons and daughters, and give them a real life and give them back** to their moms and dads.

Luke tells it well (I am reading now from a paraphrase of his next words...)

They all realized they were in a place of holy mystery, that God was at work among them. They were quietly worshipful—and then noisily grateful, calling out among themselves, "God is back, looking to the needs of his people!" The news of Jesus spread all through the country.

Luke 7.16-17 (Msg)

'God is back!!!'

The **compassion of Jesus became famous in the region**. And the compassion of Jesus has become famous in the world.

This was **something new** in the world. When most of the world's people thought of the gods, they would never have used the word compassion. The dominant religions of the world thought the gods were **capricious or cold**. The **stoics** were famous for their lack of compassion, for their ability to look at life's hardships and tragedies and *not care, not feel, not have a heart that moved towards people in their suffering*. They thought being 'passionless' was a virtue. They thought the gods were like that – because if you **cared for people, it made you vulnerable**, made you **weak**. And what kind of god could be

vulnerable, weak?

Behold the weakness of God...

*When he went ashore **he saw** a great crowd, and **he had compassion** on them and **healed** their sick.*

Matthew 14:14

*Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "**I have compassion on the crowd** because they have been with me now three days and **have nothing to eat**. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."*

Matthew 15:32

This last one is Peter's summary of the life of Jesus when he preached years later.

This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

Acts 10.36, 38

Good news and good deeds go together. That's the way it is in the kingdom, because that is **the way it is in the heart of God.**

We had a **staff retreat** this past week on this issue. We spent a lot of time talking about what has happened to **conservative Christianity**. Here's how one researcher summed up current public opinion:

The growing hostility towards Christians is very much a reflection of what outsiders feel they receive from believers. They say the aggression of believers simply matches their oversized opinions and egos. One outsider puts it this way: 'Most people I meet assume that 'Christian' means very conservative, entrenched in their thinking, antigay, antichoice, angry, violent, illogical, empire builders; they want to convert everyone, and they generally cannot live peacefully with anyone who doesn't believe what they believe.'

There are a lot of us – and I'm one of them – who think this criticism is **too true.**

God is doing something wonderful in response – **restoring his compassion** to his church. There is a movement in the new Province on this, it is called '***Following Jesus for the sake of others.***'

I like the way a bumper sticker puts it: '*Only one six billionth is about me*'

I think it would be a great thing if we were known before we are known for anything else – **known for the compassion of Jesus** for people who are suffering and caught and hurting and buried by the difficulties of life. Who are on the wrong side of life. If we had compassion that is not conditional on faith, that crosses barriers: race and religion and health and culture and morality... that reaches to in-laws and out-laws, that sees with new eyes the suffering of every person, the significance of every person...

May every ministry team, every fellowship group, every home be known for the compassion of Jesus.

God is restoring his compassion to his church!!!