

Showing Compassion

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Preacher: Jim Richards

[0 : 00] Kate just wanted me to remind or explain why you've got me here speaking to you. It's because she didn't quite say it like that.

I'm on the plan for the Methodist side of the church and the plan has a number of local preachers. David, you'll probably see more of us now that Russ has moved on.

We've got a gap, so that's why I'm here. So I'm a preacher around the circuit. So, anyway, showing compassion. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines compassion as the sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.

In other words, compassion means recognising the suffering of others, deeply caring and then taking action to help. My first reaction when I saw the theme for today was, what can I say on this to some of the most compassionate people I know?

There's so much care shown here. We see it, we share in it and we experience it. Well, I think Jesus does have something to say to us today.

[1 : 21] Both to us and also in a world where compassion seems to often take a back seat. It's not just here in the UK that the age budget is down and protectionism is up.

It's across all of the wealthy world. Several people have said similar things to this, but I found this quote from Pearl Buck, a 20th century writer.

She said, the test of a civilisation is the way that it cares for its helpless members. I think Jesus might also have a lot to say to the so-say civilised world today.

Before we look at the passage, I want to just remind ourselves of the benchmark for compassion. Let's look at some of Jesus' compassion, because we can become so familiar with him, can't we, that we almost miss how awesome that is.

So we know he magnanimously gave way to his mum and turned the water into wine at that wedding. He wept for his friend Lazarus, who had died, and for the city of Jerusalem, in all its blunt opposition to him.

[2 : 44] He stopped and listened to beggars, healed ten lepers, regardless of how they would respond to him. He spoke with a questionable woman in Samaria, of all places, and asked her for water, breaking all of the cultural taboos, before offering her life.

He is moved with pity for a widow whose son had died, and compassion for the crowds who are lost, hungry and suffering, like in Matthew 9.

He fed the hungry crowd more than once, and he spent time with tax collectors and Pharisees, outcasts and sinners. These are just some of the pointers to the depth of his compassionate heart.

Jesus had and has a heart for everyone. And that's why, even while we were still sinners, he willingly chose to die for us. Jesus, just like when he stopped by the roadside or paused his sermon for someone, will still always make time for us too.

So if you need his help with anything or for anyone, just ask him. We all know this, but I think sometimes we resist, don't we?

[4 : 06] I think that we can sometimes get trapped by that popular myth that says self-sufficiency is the way, that we have to do everything ourselves, and somehow we are failing if we ask for help.

Christian people are swayed by this. And also thinking that Jesus is too busy or too important for little old me, or else you need a pre-qualification of prayer skill or personal holiness to be given his attention.

It's all codswallop, isn't it? It's just not true. God holds each of us close to the centre of his heart, as precious and as loved.

And he's ever waiting for us to seek his face. He always makes time. So don't forget, we have a prayer team here at the end of the service. People who can ask him with you.

My favourite quote from 2025 that I found was this. It's from 24-7 Prayer Australia. It says, Prayer is looking inward towards the heart of God and then outward towards those who are on the heart of God.

[5 : 20] I really liked that. And it reminds us, we are all on his heart, the centre of his compassion. What relief is that?

And what an example for us to follow too. I really want to get on with the reading. Honestly, I do. But first, I think we need a joke.

It was quite hard finding one and an appropriate one that Russell hadn't used. But I think I've managed to find one. It's classic in style, but I've tweaked it so that you have to decide, you have to work out which character is which.

So let's have a go. An Englishman, an Irishman and a Scotsman were travelling by jumbo jet. Suddenly there was a lot of turbulence.

The plane dipped in altitude. The engines stuttered. In fact, so much so that the pilot became really concerned and really worried that the plane was going to crash.

[6 : 23] So he asked all the passengers to do something religious. At once, the first man stood up and sang over the tannoy, Nearer my God to thee.

Then the second recited the Lord's Prayer. And the third paused and reverently taking off his cap, went up and down the aisles of the plane taking up a collection.

I didn't think it was that funny really, but hey-ho. I guess we all have worked out which one of them was the third.

I don't need to tell you. National stereotypes can be a bit of banter, a bit of fun, can't they? Of course, at other times, they make those of the target group feel uncomfortable.

And in the world, we do see that the labels people put on others can be hurtful or even a cover for outright prejudice.

[7 : 30] In Jesus' time, the Jews had a lot of mistrust and dislike of the Samaritans. Some Jews despised them, treating them as second-class citizens and would often avoid travelling through Samaria rather than encountering its people.

And the feeling was mutual. Jewish travellers in Samaria were not always welcomed. This is the context for the Q&A; with Jesus in front of a crowd that largely would have been Jews.

our passage starts with the questioner, the expert in the law who wanted to know what to do to inherit eternal life.

Now, in those days, an expert in the law wasn't a lawyer but was a Bible scholar. This man would have spent his life studying the Torah. That's the first five books we have in the Old Testament.

There's a sense here of a man earnestly sorry, earnest in wanting to do the right thing who took pride in the Jewish law. And we know too that he had a really good grasp of it for Jesus commended the way he summed up the law so clearly.

[8 : 50] Love God with all that you are and love your neighbour as yourself. Incidentally, the Greek word for neighbour used here is more than about just the person living next door.

In our translations we lose something of the sense of community and fellowship that it actually means. So the scholar knew his stuff yet Jesus saw in him in this man a need to stretch his vision.

Do this and you will live challenges the scholar's comfort zone. so he seeks to justify himself and in response we hear one of the most well-known parables of Jesus.

The traveller presumably a Jew was a man on perhaps a slightly reckless journey for the Jericho Jerusalem road was through wild country and had a reputation for danger.

Attacked and left half dead means it wasn't certain whether he was alive or not. So he really needed help. But the priest and then the Levite were more interested in their own ceremonial purity than helping a fellow Jew in his adversity.

[10 : 14] Now if they had stopped and found that he was dead and not alive this would have meant for the priest and the Levite they'd been barred from the temple for a week and would have had to ritually purify themselves through washing and doing a bit of laundry.

I'm not sure how much of an inconvenience this would have been but I'm sure surely they could have worked from home maybe had meetings on carry pigeon zoom or something. I don't know.

But I get there is a sense here of where the crowd were at this point in the story. The stuffy religious folk had let the man down. The shallowness of the powerful was about to be exposed by a kind Jew.

Surely the answer is that our neighbours are our people, the community who think and act like us. Then Jesus pops that bubble of self-righteousness and mashes the boundaries to compassion.

It's a Samaritan that stops and helps. a grubby misaligned heretic. I suppose that's a bit like saying a Bristol City fan might help a Bristol Rovers one or maybe a new age traveller helping someone in Clevedon or an asylum seeker helping someone in Dover or a trans man helping an evangelical.

[11 : 42] I'm deliberately picking examples here and I'm sure you've got your own that might make you feel uncomfortable because I think that's the point of Jesus' words. The compassion of Jesus is universal.

Raw compassion doesn't ask first what you think or believe or whether you agree with me. The thing is sometimes we are encouraged to think local rather than universal.

We say charity begins at home but I'm not sure that's right and it certainly shouldn't stop there. Our compassion can be limited by our fears or suspicions of others.

Our assumptions or judgments on their nature or behaviors even on whether we like them or not. Going back to my joke when we group people and assign characteristics however minor that is we risk creating a barrier to our compassion.

So defining an age band or a subcultural group or any selection of people as they can be the first step of us moving away from the side of the road someone is lying in.

[12 : 58] In Jesus' story the Samaritan had no quibbles about helping and despite belief differences they held similar views to the Jews over ritual purity.

But he took pity on the man and was prepared to risk it using his time and money to help him. His compassion followed through leaving no doubt over his recovery.

A mark of compassion then should be holistic and I think we know that. The Samaritan dealt with the immediate need by binding the man's wounds.

He provided for the medium term spending a month or so of wages paid to the innkeeper and he covered any long term needs with his promise to return.

A few years ago some friends of ours that lived near to my dad this is down in deepest Cornwall or it was down in deepest Cornwall they agreed to keep an eye on my dad so that as his dementia kicked in he could stay living at home for as long as possible.

[14:14] When my sister and I asked them to do this I didn't realise just what it would cost them in terms of their time and their patience. Sometimes they had to visit him daily towards the end.

It was long term but they followed through on their commitments and did this out of love willingly. And I'm forever grateful to those too.

To me this is Jesus like compassion. When our compassion is of Christ's model not only is it unrestricted it follows through as far as we are able to help.

Jesus asks of us to show compassion to any and all which might mean looking wider than we expect. He asks us to show compassion as long as is needed which might be longer than we anticipate.

He asks us to show compassion in the ways he would do so which might be harder and more costly than we realise.

[15:27] For Jesus asks us to love as he loved which cost him his all for he has given us everything. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus stretch our hearts Lord we pray to be as big as yours to cover all those you love. Help us to love fully weeping with those you weep with listening to others woes helping meet needs working always towards restoring lives.

Lord may we do this fully we pray not just from our surpluses of time or money. And Lord when we worry about our capacity or fear compassion fatigue show us afresh your heart Lord point us to those who you carry there.

For when we see your heart then we will know following you is enough. And we can trust in your love. Lord you love so much you gave your life for us.

Help us show it to tell it and like in Acts 2 praise you that we may delight in the good will of many who respond to your compassion and call.

[16:53] Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you