



“Compassion, Mercy and Grace”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Matthew 9:35-10:1

³⁵ Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were oppressed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

10 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.

Sermon:

I can remember it very clearly.

I was holding my precious baby girl, and watching the news at the same time, and a news story of life in Israel/Palestine was on...and up flashed a picture of a soldier, carrying a dead baby away from a scene of carnage.

I just couldn't handle it. I burst into tears and turned away.

Much more recently many of you may remember the staggering photo of the drowned child, found on an Italian or Greek beach; a toddler who could not swim when the refugee flotilla he was a part of, overturned in the Mediterranean sea.

Recently, one of the executive ministers of our United Church of Christ, the Rev. Traci Blackmon, wrote a commentary about the mothers of black sons.

- As George Floyd was being suffocated to death, he could be heard gasping out “Mama, mama”.
- Tamir Rice’s mother saw her 12 year old son shot to death by a Cleveland cop, on a playground.
- Emmet Till’s mother insisted on an open casket funeral for her murdered 14 year old son so that all the world could see what white hate had done to her innocent boy, lynched for “sassing a white girl”. His mother’s words; “I wanted the world to see what they did to my baby.”

A mother’s grief can turn into passion. A mother’s compassion for other mothers and other children can turn into action.

What we see, and what we experience, can turn into change. It doesn’t have to be a matter of turning away.

Emmett Till’s death in 1955 fired up the civil rights movement in our nation.

George Floyd’s death has awoken the movement to end police brutality against black and brown lives.

When my daughter, soon to be a mother herself, heard the family of that drowned child on the beach, she burst into tears too, sitting in her car, weeping over her pregnant belly. But she did not turn away. She turned her grief into action.

She turned on her computer, and she googled how she could help, and texted money for refugee aid.

Jesus saw people who were oppressed, and sick in every part of their lives: sick with diseases and sick with suffering and despair.

And I believe he burst into tears for them too, and he did not turn away from their suffering either.

His compassion turned into action for them.

He shared good news with them, of God’s kingdom of love and justice, beauty and peace. He healed them.

He had compassion that turned into action for them.

So it boggles my mind when someone says that changing the world is not the work of the church.

Or that our task is to save souls for heaven, even using violent domination.

Clearly, Jesus does not think so. He cures everyone. He has compassion for all of them. He goes among their cities and villages making things better. Right there and then.

And then, he insists that his dearest friends get in on the work, too. He says that they, too, will heal and cure every disease and cast out unclean spirits. They, too, will tell the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Compassion compels him. It is going to compel his companions, too.
It compels you and me, too.

The passion Jesus had for a world of health and hope, peace and joy, is our passion, too.
And there is plenty to do, in a plenitude of ways!

Not all of us are protesting. We can't all protest, preach, march. But some of us can.
Not all of us are in hospitals, clinics, offices, as healers. Some of us are, though.
Some of us are not in the place to change our government, but some are.
Some of us are able to sway minds away from violence, towards peace.

All of us need to find our compassion. All of us need to tap into the depths of care and mercy that flow in us.

All of us need to find ways to live out the example of Jesus in our own lives, as we follow him, our Leader in compassion and mercy and grace.

What seems clear to me, is that we are not supposed to turn away.

With compassion and mercy and grace, we can find our ways to care.

I don't know where I found this document, maybe facebook, but here are a few words of wisdom to share with you...and I thank whoever the anonymous author is.

“To the person who uses metal straws to save fish but consumes animals, I'd like to say thank you. To the vegan who isn't aware of our homelessness problem, thank you. To the climate change activists who aren't attentive to fast fashion, thank you. To the girl who gives her old clothes to the disadvantaged but isn't educated on sex trafficking, thank you. To the guy who picks up rubbish on his way home from a surf but isn't well informed about male suicide rates, thank you... To the grandparents who knit for sick children but aren't up to date with current race and homophobic issues, thank you...to the peace activists, feminists, stray dog adopters, teachers, volunteers, foster carers, recyclers, givers, doers and believers, I say thank you...current world issues that you are passionate about, aren't always what other people are trying to change, and that's okay. It's not everyone's job to save every part of the world, but it is everyone's responsibility to thank every person who is doing their part to save the world. So...don't criticize, appreciate. Don't judge, educate. We're all trying our best. Thank you.”

Good people of Westminster, turn to one another in thanks! Turn to God in thanks. Give your thanks to the world, with your compassionate action, your mercy, and with your grace.