

Worship for 2nd August

Welcome to worship on the first Sunday in August. Today the theme of the worship is “compassion” which lies at the heart of our Christian faith tradition, as well as other faith traditions, and which makes us seek the wellbeing of *all* people, treating everyone equally with justice and respect. Compassion, which means to suffer or endure something *with* someone, feeling the pain and suffering as though it were your own, has been visible during the continuing corona crisis as people have selfishly and sacrificially reached out to bring kindness, comfort and healing to those who were sick or in need. But sadly, we have also witnessed a lack of compassion when instincts of selfishness and survival got the better of some people, leaders and nations. Compassion, love and concern for everyone, is what drew people to Jesus, who exemplified a divine compassion that we are called to emulate. And in this worship we will hear God speaking with the voice of the heart (as imagined by Desmond Tutu) inviting us to cultivate compassion in our lives, and thus be truly alive!

Hymn Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy

Prayer

Faithful God, you draw near to us,
in our joy and in our grief, in our hope and in our despair.
When we are down, you raise us up.
When we rejoice, you rejoice with us.
We turn to you now in search of your healing touch
God of compassion and love, move among and within us
Open our eyes, take away all fear so that we may receive the full life
you have to offer.
We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Reading Luke 7: 11-17

Reflection

In the reading in the gospel of Luke we meet a widow in need; a widow who has just lost her only son. Clearly, she is overwhelmed with

sadness and grief...but, the story does not so much focus on her but instead the story draws attention to the character of Jesus and the character of God as one who embodies compassion for all.

Remember that in this time, widows were very poor and vulnerable. If they had no family they lived at the margin of society, excluded from the community. So when the widow lost her son, her only son, she lost all that was left to her.

Jesus happens to come across the funeral procession. He did not know this woman but probably heard about her dilemma from a bystander. Jesus immediate reaction is that, filled with compassion, he raises the son (and the widow) back to life. But there is more here than Jesus raising the son (and the mother) back to life.

Perhaps it is noteworthy that the people did not see this as Jesus looking favourably upon the woman, just that he was full of compassion. The woman did not even ask Jesus to heal her son. She doesn't say anything at all, as the story goes. There was no evidence of her faith. It doesn't say that she didn't have faith; it's just not an issue. There is not even any real gratitude when it is all over. This is not the story that you would expect. It is not really about faith but, rather about grace—undeserved, unexpected, unimaginable. The choice is whether or not to receive it. It is a matter of imagining the unimaginable.

This story is not like many of the other healing stories in the gospels. We are accustomed to Jesus being approached and being asked for healing. And we are used to Jesus attributing their healing to faith - as if, somehow, they deserved their own healing because they had faith. But nothing is said here about faith. The woman does not even ask anything. She just weeps. And isn't there a point here? Healing (and wholeness) is not dependent on our faith. God is present when we ask and when do not ask, when we listen and when we wander off doing our own thing. God is God; God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.

Here, in the story, Jesus had compassion for someone who was deeply suffering, whether or not she asked, whether or not she deserved it, whether or not she was a respectable member of society or an outsider or outcast. God's presence is not because we have faith. God is there through pure, undeserved, grace.

Jesus had compassion; God has compassion. That is really what comes through in the story. And this divine compassion is the compassion that we are called to emulate. Compassion for the widows, the poor, the stranger, the orphan, the hungry, the lame, the blind, all who suffer sickness and pain..... Out of compassion – a heart of flesh, not a heart of stone - we can bring healing, hope and new life. And as we do so, we will be alive! Listen....listen to God speaking with the voice of the heart.....

Listen to God speak with the voice of the heart

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for my yoke is easy and my burden light.
Match your pace to mine, imitate me.
You are free to choose, you can choose to be like me.
Wherever you are you can create beauty.
Moment by moment you can create joy.
Instant by instant you can offer kindness
Now and always you can make me seen.
You can be as I created you to be,
The visible likeness of the invisible
You will see as I see.
And your heart will break
For all the sadness in the world.
For all the hunger and pain
You will cry every tear with me
And share every joy with me.
You will see every sparrow fall.
You will see each dying blade of grass.
You will hear every child's cry and every father's despairing sigh.
The terrified screams and hungry moans will be woven into the song of
who you are and your heart will be broken and broken again.
And then you know a heart of flesh and not a heart of stone.
You will be alive!

(Desmond Tutu, Made for Goodness, p.54-55)

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, as we sit in quietness our thoughts are probably far from quiet. We are wrestling with doubts and fears, we are looking for comfort and security, we are hoping against hope, we are seeking strength and we long for peace and justice. May your ever abiding presence and compassion bring healing and wholeness, peace of mind, thankful hearts, courage and strength to face the joys and challenges of life.....

We pray for all who are ill and we ask, O God, that you would surround them with your healing presence. Grant hope to those who despair and friendship to those who feel lost and lonely. Grant wisdom to those who carry particular responsibilities to bring healing, peace and justice, in our communities, in our country and in the world.

And we pray that we may know your love, your compassion in our lives. You know us, you care for us; we are never alone as you are present with us, in our communities and in the world.

Continue to show us how we can be part of your work in the world, reaching out with compassion to all who are in need.

Teach us how we can grow in faith and faithfulness, guided by the example of Jesus Christ in whose name we pray...OUR FATHER

Hymn

Brother, sister let me serve you

Blessing

Go in peace and love.....And should you find yourself feeling worried or discouraged, remember that the wondrous love of God, the healing power of Christ Jesus and the bold courage of the Holy Spirit go with you, today and always. Amen!