

*Matthew 5: 1 – 2, 4, 7    Colossians 3:12 - 15*

**Colossians 3** <sup>12</sup> *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

<sup>15</sup> *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

**Matthew 5** *Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them.*

*He said:*

<sup>4</sup> *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted...*

<sup>7</sup> *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

**Compassion** (Col 3:12) = *to suffer with.* Most caring child awards ceremony Winner: 4 yr old boy. Neighbour had lost wife. I just sat on his lap and helped him cry.

Hebrew word is related to that for womb – a mother's gut love for her child. Greek word *Splagchnizomai* = spleen.

AV *Put on therefore...holy and beloved, bowels of mercies*

These all point to something coming from the guts, the bottom of your heart - very different from "cold charity"

Compassion is at the very heart of God's nature: **Exodus 34:6** *And the Lord passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The **Lord**, the **Lord**, the **compassionate** and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness*

*Viz J's parable to show people the nature of God, the story of the prodigal son: **Luke 15:20** while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with **compassion** for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

And since Jesus is the exact image of God the father in human form, it's no surprise that his manifesto for his mission on earth was taken from Isaiah 61 – it is an outworking of God's compassion: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* He began by saying to them, *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

Again and again we are told that Jesus had compassion: on the crowds:

The sick **Matthew 14:14** *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had **compassion** on them and healed their sick.*

The hungry **Matthew 15:32** *Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have **compassion** for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."*

The harassed **Matthew 9:36** *When he saw the crowds, he had **compassion** on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

On individuals like the 2 blind men: **Matthew 20:34**

*Jesus had **compassion** on them and touched their eyes.*

All of Jesus' healing miracles flowed from his compassionate heart.

So how do we become more compassionate like Jesus - as individuals and as a church?

This is where the Beatitudes help us: *Blessed are those who mourn:*

*Yes it applies to those grieving over the death of a loved one, but to all of us, for we are all called to weep with those who weep*

*Viz Jesus with Martha and Mary after the death of brother Lazarus:*

**John 11** <sup>33</sup> *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. This is extraordinary, when you consider that Jesus knew what he was about to do: to raise Lazarus from the dead and would in a few minutes time be turning the grief of Martha and Mary into pure joy.*

So why did Jesus weep? Because he doesn't sweep into the situation as a triumphalist saviour, but he comes alongside Martha and Mary in their grief and pain. He was also weeping for all those who grieve, all those whose lives are wrecked by the premature death of a loved one. He was weeping for a world which is marked and marred by death and disease and sorrow. As Tom Wright puts it, we Christians worship a God, the eternal Creator, the Word made flesh, who cries at the death of his friends. *A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief*

Jesus not only wept with those who wept, but he had a deep compassion for those also for those who were oblivious to their predicament: when He has such concern for the crowds who were *harassed and helpless* it's because He sees them as being, *like sheep without a shepherd.*

<sup>37</sup> *Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."* In other words, Jesus saw that their greatest need was to be harvested for the kingdom - he knew that their greatest need was to hear the gospel of God's love and forgiveness.

So he wept with those who wept and with those who **did not** weep: *Dominus flevit church on the Mount of Olives built with a huge tear-drop shaped window overlooking Jerusalem to commemorate: **Luke 19** <sup>41</sup> Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Jesus could see the terrible judgement that was going to come up Jerusalem just 40 years later and that this in turn would be just an expression of the greater judgement that all must face without Christ.*

Do we like Christ mourn for the lost – for those who do not know Him, who are indeed like sheep without a shepherd. My goodness when we look at the mess that our nation has got itself into, not just politically but morally – how do we react? with anger or grief? Jesus actually reacted with both. Those who have been bereaved will know that both anger and grief are part of the mourning process. Jesus was angry against the forces of death, disease, and destruction which destroyed lives, but filled with grief and compassion for each individual that both He and his Father love so much.

During this last week or so, those of us following the readings for *Morning Prayer*, have been ploughing through the early chapters of Isaiah – and to be honest it has been pretty hard work, because there has been a lot of woe and judgement against both the enemies of Israel and against Israel itself. It's not easy, but we need to be reminded of the reality of judgement because in our present age, we bury our heads in the sand. Even we followers of Christ are affected by the popular unspoken belief that however we live, when we die we go to "a better place". ***That is not what Jesus told us!***

It is only when we face up to the realities of life without Christ that we will mourn – whether for ourselves, or our families or neighbours or colleagues. And it's only if we mourn that we will ultimately be comforted – as our compassion for those dear sheep without a shepherd, whom Jesus loves so much – leads us pray for them with compassionate and passionate hearts, and to show the love and light of Jesus to them and as we see them come to discover his love.

This leads us to our 2<sup>nd</sup> Beatitude: *7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.* Being merciful comes from recognising *There but for the grace of God go I* and indeed sometimes just *There go I* - because *we* don't always walk in the grace of God either. How can I not forgive or be generous in my understanding and attitude towards my neighbour, when I know that God has forgiven me so much and is so generous and full of grace towards me?

If I don't show mercy it's because I think that I am somehow superior and more deserving of God's love and forgiveness than my neighbour is – that is the way of self-righteousness, the way of pride, the way of the Pharisees. This is why *being merciful* is a condition of *being shown mercy*, because showing mercy, or not, is a litmus test of the state of our heart before God. We recognise this every time we pray the Lord's prayer:

*Forgive us our sins – as we forgive those who sin against us.*

This brings us back full circle to our first Beatitude: *Blessed are those who mourn* – for we are called to mourn not only for others, not only to weep with those who weep, but to mourn for ourselves – for our own failures, our own sin, our own lack of compassion. Here too we will be blessed: we will be comforted by the knowledge of God's grace and forgiveness and transforming power.

How do we become more compassionate? Look at the compassion of Jesus. Then look at yourself through the compassionate eyes of Jesus and then look at every person you meet through the compassionate eyes of Jesus as well