

Compassion Sunday sermon

INTRODUCTION

Start by praying and asking God to use your words for His glory.

WHAT IS COMPASSION?

Can anyone here remember a time when they've felt compassion?

Perhaps you feel compassion for those poor X Factor contestants who enter the stage with such hope and sing their hearts out, only to be cut down to size by the sharp tongue of Simon Cowell.

Maybe you feel it when you've been watching your child play tennis against a stronger opponent and been a helpless onlooker as they double fault, hit the net and struggle to put up a fight on court. Or you might possibly have felt moved by images of desperate refugees going to extraordinary lengths to flee war and build a better life for their children.

WHAT DOES COMPASSION MEAN?

Well, according to The Cambridge dictionary, "Compassion is a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering of others and a desire to help them." In short, it's an emotional reaction to pain or suffering that inspires us to respond.

BUT WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

If we take a look at the Bible, the Greek word for 'compassion' is used only 12 times in the New Testament and 9 of those are by Jesus. The literal translation means 'to be moved to one's bowels', which I appreciate sounds rather old fashioned and even a little painful. But the 'bowels' were thought to be the very core of your being; the place where all love and pity comes from. Those listening to Jesus would have understood compassion to be a deep and powerful state of being, rather than a simple fleeting feeling.

To show you compassion in action, I'd like to take a moment to read you the story of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25-37.





READ LUKE 10:25-37

- ²⁵On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
- ²⁶"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"
- ²⁷He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"
- ²⁸"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."
- ²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"
- ³⁰In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.
- ³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

- ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.
- ³³But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'
- ³⁶"Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"
- ³⁷The expert in the law replied,"The one who had mercy on him."Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Luke 10:33 describes the Samaritan as having 'pity' when he saw the injured man; in the New King James translation it describes him as having 'compassion.'

What I think is really clear is that pity, or compassion, is not just a fleeting emotion, to be passed away when something else crosses our mind. Compassion doesn't inspire a few words of sympathy and an empathetic nod. Compassion means action.

The Samaritan didn't just stop. He got physically involved in dressing the man's wounds, he offered friendship, transport and he provided ongoing financial support so the injured man could be properly looked after.

The Samaritan got well and truly involved in the life of the injured man.

He risked his safety, delayed his schedule, and got dirty and bloody by coming alongside a man in need. Let's not forget that these were times of social and racial tension and by helping a Jew, he was also putting himself at risk, all for a complete stranger.





JESUS' NATURE

This is just one example Jesus gave of compassion in action. But if you look at Jesus' own ministry it revolves around healing and spending time with those who mourn. Jesus repeatedly preaches about sharing what we have with those in need.

In Matthew 9: 35-38 we hear that "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Jesus was a man filled with compassion. When Jesus sees those in need, he never turns his back. In fact, there are more than 2,000 verses in the Bible that refer to issues of injustice and taking care of the poor. It's so integral to our faith that if you were to cut all those verses out of your Bible, it would fall apart completely. It's that important.

As Christians we can spend a lot of time debating the way we do things, but caring for the poor is something that should unite us completely, without debate. It's so clearly something we shouldn't just be talking about, but actually doing something about.

Perhaps the verse in James 2:18 sums it up most perfectly: "...But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds."

THE BODY OF CHRIST

If we know we should be helping the poor, then perhaps the greatest challenge is how we can go about it. Thankfully, God has an answer for that too - the Church.

With 2.2 billion Christians across the world, nearly one third of the global population believe in Christ. There are Christians in some of the world's most remote, most dangerous and hardest to reach corners of the earth.

What's more, within the Church we have a wide range of skills. We have people who can do everything from building houses and flying planes to offering counselling and managing finances. Together we're well equipped to meet the challenges of our time.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4 we are told "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work."





In verse 12 it goes on to say:

¹²Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many."

It doesn't matter that we're not all called to be overseas missionaries. It doesn't matter what your job is or where you live. We can all help. We can all go forth and disciple people of all nations.

If you think again of the Good Samaritan, he wasn't a doctor or a physician, he was just a regular guy who stopped to take an injured man to a place where he knew he'd be well looked after. He then used the resources that were at his disposal to ensure the man was well cared for. The same thing is happening today. Across the world there are churches based in some of the world's poorest communities, doing what they can to help those in need. They are positioned to be the hands and feet of Jesus right where they are. What they so often lack is finance and support; that's where the global Church can rally behind them.

Together we can make each other stronger. But how? What's the link?

WHAT ABOUT COMPASSION?

Well, there are organisations out there that can make the link for us. Organisations like Compassion, who equip churches in some of the world's poorest countries with the skills, resources and finances to reach out to the poor, the sick and the vulnerable within their communities. And the most vulnerable are so often children.

Children account for nearly half of all those who live in extreme poverty. They bear the brunt of war, disease and often have no voice to speak up against the injustice they endure. The good news is that there is something we can do.

Compassion partners with nearly 7,000 local Christian churches in 25 countries across the world. They help these churches to reach out to care for the vulnerable children within their communities. Collectively, they're supporting more than 1.8 million children worldwide.





As an organisation that's Christ-centred, Compassion is inspired to respond as Jesus did – focusing on individuals, recognising their individuality and showing them how precious and unique they are.

Not only are these children being given very practical benefits like food, clothing and education, but loving Christian staff know them personally. They ensure the children are given a chance to learn about Jesus and his love for them and that they have a place where they can just be children and enjoy the freedom of playing with their friends.

So where do we come in? The great thing about Compassion is that, just as Jesus did, we make it personal. Jesus wants us to care so much that we're not just feeling something but we're actually doing something. We're giving part of our wellearned income today to a child who we know is in need, but we're also sharing our lives with them. When you sponsor a child you are committing not only financially, but also relationally by praying for a child and sending letters to encourage them and their family. It's amazing how a child can bridge the global divide and unite us as the Body of Christ.

Perhaps it's no surprise when Jesus tells us in Matthew 25:40 "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

To really show you Compassion in action, I've got a short film I'd like to share with you. I think it demonstrates, far better than I could ever articulate, how responding to Jesus's call to work together to help the poor is actually a highly effective tool to fight global poverty and reach the world's most vulnerable children.

(SHOW THE FILM)

Isn't that incredible? To think that one person's step of faith can start a chain of events that results in so many lives being transformed for the better. We can all be part of that important work.

I pray that every one of you will have the opportunity to stand in front of Jesus and hear Him say, "Thank you. When I was hungry you fed me. When I was thirsty you gave me something to drink. When I was a poor child you became my loving sponsor, you sponsored me and spoke hope and encouragement into my life."

We know we're called to respond and through Compassion we have a real, tangible and highly effective way to make a difference.

Can I ask you today to seriously consider becoming a Good Samaritan and sponsoring a child?

Thank You and God bless you.



