

Wesley United Methodist Church

June 28, 2015

"The Spirit of Compassion!"

Mark 5:21-43

Some years ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote these powerful words. Listen:

"How do I measure success? To laugh often and much;

To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;

To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure betrayal of false friends;

To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others;

To leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a redeemed social condition, or a job well done;

To know that even one life has breathed because you lived...that is to have succeeded."

I like that very much. It's a beautiful statement...but, somehow I want to add one more ingredient to the mix, namely...compassion! The spirit of compassion...The touch of compassion.

Without that special Christian quality in our lives...our lives cannot really be successful!

We can be highly educated, we can rise to places of prominence in this world, we can accumulate lots of wealth, we can even win numerous awards...but even after we have done all those things if we are not loving, compassionate people our lives are failures, empty shells...because we have missed the key component in life and God's most important lesson...namely "Loving Compassion"...Jesus called it "the most significant sign of discipleship.

In John's Gospel, He said it like this: "A new commandment I give you that you love one another as I have loved you. by this, all will know that you are my disciples." (John 13:34-35)

Jesus not only taught compassion. He lived it. And because of that, his heart zeroed in on the neediest person in a crowd. How quickly he noticed a rejected and lonely Zacchaeus up in a sycamore tree. He sensed the intensity and heard the urgency in the cry of blind Bartimaeus on the roadside. And in each case, he reached out with compassion to give the help that was needed.

Now we see it again in the tender story in Mark 5. Remember the story with me.

Jesus is on his way to see a little girl who is critically ill...when suddenly he is interrupted.

As he is moving through a large crowd,...a woman who has been hemorrhaging non-stop for twelve years discreetly slips up behind Jesus and timidly touches the hem of his robe. Right then, the story tells us, the bleeding stops.

She thinks she has gone unnoticed, so she drops back trying to lose herself in the huge crowd. But then, Jesus stops, turns around and asks: "Who touched me?" His disciples are astonished and somewhat put out by that question. "Who touched you?" "What do you mean 'who touched you?'" The crowd is pressing in all around us...pushing and shoving. Everybody is touching everybody. What kind of question is that?" But Jesus knows that it was a special touch. He begins to look around. The woman had not expected to be found out. But now she fearfully steps forward and she tells Jesus her ailment... She had this bleeding for so long and that she had tried everything...doctors, medicines, magic, wives tales, superstitions...but to no avail...no improvement...in fact she has only gotten worse. She tells Jesus that she has heard about him and his power to heal...and that she felt that if she could just touch his clothing, she could be made well...and it worked! It worked! the bleeding has stopped!

Jesus' heart goes out to her and he speaks to her tenderly: "Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace and be healed of your disease." In this story we not only see the compassionate side of Jesus, but we also discover some of the characteristics of compassion that we may want to cultivate in our lives...

First of all, compassion is sensitive to the needs of others...it is aware, tuned in, responsive, sensitive to the needs of others. Hundreds of people were pressing in upon Jesus that day. They were hanging all around him, rushing to be near him, pushing and shoving, reaching out to touch him...yet out of that mass, Jesus became aware of one person, one need, one touch. He felt something unique and special as the woman tried to secretly touch the hem of his robe...

Jesus had so many great moments like that with people...and sadly the truth is we have so few. Jesus had tender moments where he felt the touch, heard the cry, sensed the need, zeroed in on the person, seized the moment. You know why, don't you? He was sensitive to the need of others.

Second, compassion takes advantage of interruptions. This past week I skimmed through the Gospels and put together what I consider to be a very impressive list of interruptions. Here's the list: The Good Samaritan Parable, The Great Commandment, The Blessing of the children,

The Healing of the Ten Lepers, The Healing of the Paralytic, Blind Bartimaeus, The Healing of the blind man from birth, The Rich Young Ruler, Zacchaeus, Nicodemus.

Wonder what these stories have in common? They are all special moments in the Scriptures...and they were all produced by interruptions. Jesus with his compassionate heart, took advantage of these interruptions and redeemed them and used them to do good.

We see it again here in Mark 5. Jesus was on his way to see the critically ill daughter of Jairus, when he heals this woman of hemorrhage.

This raises a question that should haunt all of us...How many special moments have we missed? How many special moments with our children, our spouses, our friends, our co-workers, or even strangers have we missed because we were too tired, too busy, or too preoccupied?

Third, compassion is gracious. Notice how gracious Jesus is to the woman. He calls her daughter...an obvious term of endearment. He doesn't fuss at her or criticize her or question her.

He doesn't condemn her for being superstitious. He doesn't even give her a theology lesson.

He just meets her where she is. He accepts her, encourages her and heals her in a gracious way. He doesn't take the credit...he gives her faith the credit. "Your faith has made you well."

I have been in the ministry now for 31 years...and over the years I have noticed something that I think is very significant. The great Christians all possess this magnificent spirit...of graciousness and humility. So, how can we be exposed to the life and teachings and the spirit of Jesus and not realize the importance of love, mercy and grace? Our Lord's spirit is a constant call and challenge to us to be compassionate, gracious people.

But you know, it's not enough to just feel it. We have to do something about it. Compassion can't sit still. Jesus shows us that over and over. Compassion is love gone to work. It is active!

Remember how the poet put it:

"A bell is not a bell till it's rung;
A song is not a song till it's sung;
Love is not put into your heart to stay,
Love is only love when you give it away."