

COMPASSION BEYOND LIMITATION

By

Clarence G. Page

Luke 6:27-38 (NRSV)

²⁷“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³² “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.^[a] Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap, for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

Showing compassion is what we all do. Showing compassion is what we are about as a people, as individuals. We show mercy in different ways and at other times. When is the last you have shown compassion? How did it make you feel? Did you feel belonged, accepted, and appreciated? There is something about compassion that makes us feel connected and belong. Today, our message is about compassion and how we respond in showing that compassion. So, what is compassion? Is it important? Is it necessary, and do we need it? Compassion is about relationships, interacting, engaging with one another, and we can easily do that, especially when we feel good about each other. It is the expression of thoughts and feelings. Yes, it takes all

these attributes to define compassion and have real meaning to impact people's lives and relationships. In other words, compassion is powerful and connecting, and very empowering.

In our biblical story, Jesus came down a mountain near the Sea of Galilee and stood on a plain surface to preach to many people that came from Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. And he began to preach, speaking words of wisdom, the word of God. The people were mesmerized and so impressed with Jesus' ministry that they had a strong desire to be in His presence and follow Him from place to place. While speaking or preaching and having their attention, Jesus began to talk about compassion in an unexpected way. He spoke to them about loving their enemies, powerful words of compassion. In preparing this message, I wondered why Jesus talked about loving your enemies. And I learned the people of His day were under the dominance of the Roman Empire and did not have much freedom and peace. Jesus spoke with compassion to them that they might receive what He had to say. And Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." What Jesus is saying here are potent words.

Don't you think? I would say hearing these words would get anyone's attention. These words got my attention by reading them. I must admit that loving my enemies is a hard thing to do. Is it hard for you? Can you love your enemies? Can you love them when they are causing harm to you? Can you turn the other cheek and let someone hurt you again? Yes, these are hard serious questions, but they are critical questions. Turning the other cheek doesn't mean you are a coward or afraid to stand up for yourself. It means you are concerned about keeping peace and respecting your neighbor and, of course, not being taken advantage of at the same time.

Jesus said, "Do to others as you would have them do unto you." These words are easy to say, but when someone is doing you wrong, you will most of the time not think about doing to others as you would want them to do unto you, neither feel that way. You know, it takes a lot to be good and do good. It takes a lot to be a Christian, a good Christian. When was the last time you went out of the way to be good or do good to someone who did you wrong? What was it like for you? How did you feel? I'm sure that was a stressful moment for you. It would have been a stressful moment for me. During my time in the ministry, I must admit I had many experiences sucking it up, not saying a word from all the negativism and mistreatments I received over the years, and I still showed compassion. It takes a good heart to show mercy, especially today.

Today, it seems like so many people are cold-hearted and enjoy only themselves or those close to them. Don't you think so?

However, it is essential to note that these words spoken by Jesus are words we should not only hear but are words to govern how we live, relate, and engage others. He said showing compassion is not all about loving those who love us and enjoying their presence, but about others, going out of our way for others, even our enemies. What would you do if your enemy was in trouble or need? What would you do? What would you do if your enemy was left beaten up beside the road? Would you stop and lend a help-and-hand, or would you turn and go another way? Again, Jesus said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." What is mercy? Can we be merciful? Can we forgive those who do us wrong? Holding grudges can cause more hurt and pain, more extended periods of suffering. I have heard many times people say, "I might forgive, but I will never forget." Yes, we may never forget, but we can forgive. Forgiveness soothes the pain. Forgiveness may be the only way to let go when we can do nothing else in some circumstances.

In thinking about facing our enemies, who are our enemies? Can we name them? Sometimes we can, and sometimes, we can't. However, we know our enemies aren't about our good interests. We are often challenged and still required to do good to them. Can it be done? Can we do it despite our hurt and pain? I am reminded of this poem by William Ernest Henley, and it goes like this:

Out of the night that covers me, Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance, My head is bloody, but unbowed.

These are powerful spoken words by Henley and have much significance. He challenges us to look beyond ourselves, beyond our circumstances, and keep looking up, keep our heads unbowed, and thank our God for our unconquerable soul. By the way, we are treated sometimes by our enemies, we may feel conquered, but in Christ, we can never defeat. Yes, we will have challenging times, challenging moments but never destroyed by them. Apostle Paul says, "Who should separate us...nothing should be able to separate for the love of God in Christ Jesus." In other words, Paul is asking us to be steadfast in doing good even when we feel uncomfortable or

unappreciated, or mistreated. We choose to do what is right, fair, honest, and just no matter the circumstance.

Now, in final thought, in a nutshell, Jesus tells us to show compassion beyond our limitations. To do this, I must say it is hard, and sometimes, very hard. We don't like being taken advantage of by someone. We don't like turning the other cheek to show love when we have been hurt or still may be hurting. Therefore, we must look beyond ourselves, our hurt feelings, and circumstances to be Christlike, humble, obedient, and continue to trust God's guidance in showing love despite being mistreated and wrong by others. We should always remind ourselves of these words, "vengeance is mine's, I will repay says, the Lord." Amen.