



A Spiritual Encouragement Message

October 14, 2020

Compassion

by Randall Jarrell

Recently I heard of an article that gave a synopsis of the sermon on Christmas Sunday at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC. The preacher began his message this way: "Let me begin with the comments of a drug dealer to a minister. . .

When a kid gets up in the morning and heads off to school, I am there. When he comes homes from school, I am there. When he comes out to play, I'm there... They know where I am, Where are you?"

That question is for all of us.
Evil is all around us.
Where is the church of Jesus?

I write these words at a moment in history when our nation is deeply divided. We disagree with each other and often we don't trust each other. Across the political spectrum we are beginning to realize that what is wrong with America is both moral and spiritual. I think people are beginning to see that it is going to take more than money to rebuild our cities and our homes, our families and marriages, and to preserve our children into the next generation.

We need a new birth of compassion. Compassion means to suffer with another person. The word has a strong personal element. To have compassion means more than just feeling sorry for somebody. It means to get down where they are in their need and to suffer with them in their pain. When Noah Webster published An American Dictionary of the English Language in 1828, he began his definition of compassion this way: "*A suffering with another; painful sympathy.*" As an illustration of this "painful sympathy," Noah Webster quotes Luke 15:20, "His father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." That verse is very significant because it shows us that compassion is more than just a feeling. It's not just an emotion. It's more than feeling sorry for people in trouble. **Biblical compassion means that you see the problem, you are moved by the need, you go out to where the problem is, and you get your hands dirty trying to help one person after another get their problems solved and raise them up to a higher level of life.**

We see this in a number of places in the life of Christ.

- Matthew 14:14 tells us that Jesus had compassion on the great crowd following him, so he healed the sick and then fed the 5000.
- Matthew 15:32 says that Jesus felt the same compassion on another crowd and so fed the 4000. When Jesus saw the two blind men of Jericho, Matthew 20:34 tells us that he was filled with compassion and healed them on the spot
- Mark 1:40-41 offers the most telling example of what compassion meant to our Lord Jesus. "*A leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean."* Moved

with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." Here is the most shocking part of that text: Jesus touched a leper!

In doing that, he broke all the customs and rules of that day. According to the Old Testament, if you had leprosy, you were unclean. People were so scared of lepers that they made them live in a colony away from the rest of society so they would not contaminate anyone else. But when Jesus saw the man with leprosy, he was so moved that he reached out and touched him.

Please understand something. For our Lord Jesus Christ, compassion was not a feeling; it was a commitment to get involved with hurting people. Real compassion is more than a feeling. Real compassion moves from feeling to action. The Apostle Peter described Jesus in a one-sentence summary of Jesus' ministry: *"He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."* Acts 10:38 *"He went about doing good."* Short, concise, right to the point. Most of us would not react kindly if someone called us a "do-gooder," but the original "do-gooder" was our Lord Jesus Christ.

One day a man came to see our Lord with a curious question: *"Who is my neighbor?"* In one sense, that question seems to answer itself. Just look around. Your neighbors are all around you. They live on your street, you go to school with them, you shop at the same stores, eat at the same restaurants, you drive the same streets they do, you work with your neighbors, and you see them when you go to church. Your neighbors are all around you. Simple answer, or so it would seem. But buried within it is a deeper theological question. All the Jews knew that God commanded his people to love him with a whole heart. But Leviticus 19:18 adds an important application: *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* If loving God is hard, loving your neighbor is equally hard but in a different way, especially when you add those last two words, "as yourself." So the question comes, "Who is my neighbor?" In answer to this important question, Jesus told a story that we call the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). Read those verses right now if you do not remember the story.

Let me make two observations about it.

First, what this Samaritan did was truly above and beyond normal human obligations.

Today if we saw a beaten man lying by the road, we would first call 911 and then do what we could while we waited for help to arrive. But there were no EMTs on the treacherous road winding through the mountains from Jerusalem down to Jericho. If this man were to survive, the Samaritan would have to take the whole burden on himself. Either he got involved or the man died. There were no other options. Seen in that light, many of us might have hesitated. After all, we've got things to do, places to go, people to see. I don't know anyone who isn't busy these days. The demands of life lie heavily on all of us. And you can't save the world. You just can't. No matter who you are or how much you care or how hard you work or how much you pray, you can't save them all.

You can't rescue every baby.

You can't save every marriage.

You can't help every homeless person.

But you can light a candle in the darkness.

No, you can't rescue every hurting child. It just can't be done. But that is no reason not to help those who cross your path.

So why did the Samaritan get involved when the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side?

It's not a matter of busyness nor is it a matter of preparation. I suppose one could argue that his background as an outcast made him more likely to respond to human need. That's possible, and it may in fact be true, but Jesus does not stress that point.

The priest had no idea that morning about the man by the side of the road.

Neither did the Levite.

Neither did the Samaritan.

All we know is that his compassion moved him to action. At that particular moment, this particular Samaritan saw this particular man robbed, beaten and left for dead, and he decided to get involved. We need not ask what he would have done if he had seen 10 men lying by the road or if he had seen 100 men robbed, beaten, and left for dead. He cared enough to help the man he actually did see. That's all that matters.

There is a second point to notice. The Samaritan could not have known what he was getting himself into. I've already noted that few of us would have done what he did. But don't miss the point. When he saw this man by the road, he evidently didn't do a mental calculation and say, "I'm going to end up paying for this man's hotel bill." That would come somewhere down the road. As a practical matter, he couldn't have known what was required. The only decision he had to make was, "Should I get involved or should I pass by on the other side of the road?"

We rarely know what compassion will demand of us. Which is why we ought not to be overly calculating before we get involved. Sometimes the help we give will be brief and easy to do. Other times we will discover that the demands are long-lasting and heavy to bear. Most of the time we can't do it all by ourselves. Even in this story, the Samaritan didn't stick around and try to nurse the man back to health himself. He left him in the care of the innkeeper and then went on his way.

No one can do it all, and no one is being asked to do it all. But we can all do something. And when we come to the end of the story Jesus told... ..it actually ends in a question and then a simple command.

"Which of these was the true neighbor to the man in need?"

The priest?

The Levite?

The Samaritan?

It's not a trick question.

Then comes the simple application: "Go and do likewise."

But in the story Jesus told, the real question is not, "Who is my neighbor?" but rather "Whose neighbor will I be to those I meet today?" The onus is always on me, not on those in need. In the story Jesus told, it's not about the man in need. It's about those who had a chance to help and didn't, and the one man who did what he could even though he could have walked away. Compassion is not something you talk about. Compassion is something you do. If you want your neighborhood to be changed, get involved. Your neighborhood could be changed, but we have to do it the hard way, the slow way, the quiet way, the unseen, difficult way. But in God's economy, that's the only way it works.

Let me give you three ways to apply this article of encouragement:

- 1) We need to pray aggressively.
- 2) We need to be radically personal.
- 3) We need to begin this week.

How do you change the world? Not through programs and not even through preaching done at a distance. You change the world one heart at a time, one life at a time. Compassion that isn't personal isn't compassion. God help us to be men and women of compassion, to reach out and touch a hurting world.