

September 26, 2010  
Rev. Dr. Steven H. Koski  
“Love Sets You Free”  
Matthew 9.35-38  
James 2.14-19

Teresa of Avila, a Christian saint, lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a time of immense suffering in the world.

She wrote these words,

“Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which Christ looks with Compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, Yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he looks Compassion on this world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

Our Bible reading today said when Jesus looked over the crowd he had compassion, his heart literally broke.

Another Christian saint, St. Julian of Norwich, said, “As I see God there is no condemnation, there is no wrath; instead, there is all compassion – a compassion made flesh and dwelling among us in Jesus.”

Our theme for this year is to Love Like Jesus – I want to look a little closer at one aspect of that love – our Bible reading today said When Jesus looked over the crowd, he had compassion – his heart literally broke.

To love like Jesus is to love with compassion, we are the eyes with which Jesus looked over the crowd, he had compassion – We are the

eyes with which Jesus looks on this world with compassion— Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good – Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.

There is a wonderful passage in Frederick Buechner’s book, The Alphabet Grace, “Feet are religious too. I say if you want to know who you are, if you are more than academically interested in that particular mystery, you could do a lot worse than look at your feet for an answer.

When you wake up in the morning, called by God to be a self again, called by God to be the person you were created to be, if you want to know who you are, watch your feet. Because where your feet take you, that is who you are.”

I wonder if that is why Jesus lovingly, tenderly and with great compassion washed the disciple’s feet – Because he knew how different it would be to respond to his invitation to “follow me . . . walk in my footsteps . . . love and I love.”

Our scripture said Jesus walked through all the towns and villages . . . he looked over the crowds and he was filled with compassion – his heart literally broke.

The Dalai Lama once said, “Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, the heart of humanity cannot survive. Without love and compassion, your heart cannot survive.”

Every day we never question the need and the importance to eat or to sleep. They are necessary for our survival, our health, our well-being, what if we approached expressing love and compassion in the same way . . . not as an option or luxury but as a necessity for our soul health . . . our spiritual well-being – as a necessity for the survival of this world that God cherishes so much.

A couple weeks ago during Rally Sunday, I suggested we need to ask ourselves one year from now – Am I more loving and compassionate person today than I was a year ago?

Are we a more loving and compassionate congregation today than we were a year ago? One way to understand spiritual maturity is to be growing into the likeness of Christ. “We love, because God first loved us.”

What are those spiritual practices that will deepen our own sense of God’s unconditional love? What are the spiritual practices that will allow that love to flow freely and generously through our lives into the world?

Again, the Dalai Lama said, “When we are able to reach beyond the confines of our narrow self-interest and develop compassion for others, our hearts become healthy and filled with strength.”

When Jesus looked over the crowd, he was filled with compassion – To love like Jesus is to - to grow into the image of Christ – is to increase our capacity for compassion. The word compassion actually means “to suffer with.”

The Greek word that we find in the New Testament for compassion – *splanchna* – means the entrails or as we might say today “the guts.”

It is a deep and powerful word, used twelve times in the gospels, always referencing Jesus or God. The entrails or the “guts” is where we feel passionate.

When the scripture says that Jesus is moved with compassion this word tells us that Jesus was not just feeling a superficial sympathy, “Aw . . . that’s too bad for them.”

Rather, He empathized so deeply, Jesus literally entered into people's suffering, felt their pain, knew their deepest longings.

Compassion was a part of his very nature it was the way his brain was equipped, the way that he lived. It was integral to his very being – it went so deep.

Jesus was always in the trenches with people. He was FOR people . . . first. Before the rules and the laws. Before religion.

In fact, he broke the strict religious rules of his day to be able to heal on the Sabbath or talk to a Samaritan woman or save a woman caught in adultery who was about to be stoned to death or to touch a leper.

He consistently acted in ways the religious people around him couldn't understand and thought inappropriate, and was even threatened by.

At first they raised their eyebrows. Then they got mad. Then they killed him. Jesus was so in touch with God's heart, he couldn't help but live and love the way he did.

He didn't think about the pain and suffering of others – He felt that pain as if it was his own in the innermost part of his being. He hurt because they hurt. God's compassionate heart was beating in his own heart. God's unconditional love and compassion flowed through his veins.

It's interesting, the Hebrew word for compassion is – rachamim – it is the plural for womb. Compassion refers to the womb of God where all divine tenderness and gentleness lies hidden.

Could compassion be tantamount to living from the womb of God – Could it be through compassion, new life is born?

Father Henri Nouwen put it beautifully in his book entitled, Compassion.

“When Jesus was moved with compassion the Source of all life trembled, the ground of all love burst open, and the ways of God’s immense, inexhaustible and unfathomable tenderness revealed itself.”  
(*Compassion*, p. 15)

Marcus Borg wrote, “It is only when we appreciate Jesus’ emphasis on compassion that we realize how radical his message and vision were. For Jesus, compassion was more than a quality of God and an individual virtue: it was a social paradigm . . . a way of understanding life . . . it was the core value of his life in community.”

In other words, as a church, as followers of Jesus, we are to be defined by our compassion. But compassion is far more than just a feeling. Notice that every time Jesus is moved with compassion . . . he does something about it.

I wonder even that if we say we feel compassion and do nothing that perhaps it isn’t compassion but sympathy – we don’t “suffer with” but say removed and distant and “feel sorry for.” In the life of Jesus, we see that compassion always ends up being something you do.

Every time the Bible mentions Jesus felt compassion he changed the situation. He raised the widow’s son. He heals the leper. He opens the eyes of the blind. He feeds the hungry crowd.

And in today’s Bible reading, he sees the crowd, harassed and helpless, and he is filled with compassion . . . his heart breaks – And calls his followers to be his feet and hands – and says, “Look at all these people . . . feel their pain . . . the harvest is plentiful . . . But the laborers are few . . . You go – Be a laborer . . . Be a shepard – be my hands and feet – Be love!

St. Teresa of Avila again wrote, “Yours are the eyes with which Christ looks with compassion on this world.”

Presbyterian Women of our church and our Peace & Justice Team are inviting us to open our eyes and see and feel the pain and suffering of those enslaved in human trafficking this Tuesday night at 7:00 p.m. right here in the sanctuary. Don’t miss it!

Some of you may be surprised to even hear that slavery exists in our modern day.

Yet, there are more slaves today than ever before in history. The traditional definition of slavery is forced labor with little or no pay under the threat of violence.

Human trafficking is a \$32 billion a year industry that’s on track to overtake drugs and arms dealing. There are at least 27 million slaves worldwide, half of them are children.

These numbers are hard to count, but UNICEF tells us that at least . . . At least two million children every year are taken into forced prostitution.

I urge you to come this Tuesday and invite others that we might open our eyes and see with compassion –

There are places near us and in our world where God’s heart is breaking – where the laborers are few – and Christ is calling his followers to walk in his footsteps . . . to be his hands and feet – to allow our hearts to break –

To allow ourselves to feel compassion – that the ground of all love might burst open and God’s immense, inexhaustible, unfathomable love might reveal itself.

I want to invite us to open our eyes for a minute and see with compassion Jyoti – and hear her story that is like so many other stories– and see how the power of compassion can change someone’s story . . . change the world’s story.

Many thanks to the International Justice Mission for sending me these photographs. IJM is a human rights agency that works toward justice and freedom for victims of slavery, sexual exploitation and other forms of violent oppression.

Jyoti is a beautiful child of God . . . 15 years old. She comes from a really poor family.

One day four women come to her village and say, “Jyoti, come with us. We’ll take you to the city. We’ll get you a job. You can make a lot of money, and then you can send that money back to feed your family.” So, Jyoti, wanting to feed her family, goes with them.

On the way to the city, they offer her tea that is drugged. She falls unconscious, and the next thing she knows, she wakes up and she is in the red-light district being sold into a brothel for \$250.

They take Jyoti down into a basement, and for the next three days, they beat her with electrical cords, plastic pipes and metal rods. They beat girls like this to tell them, “You are hopeless. You are powerless, and you are helpless against your oppressors.”

After she is beaten Jyoti is taken and she is forced to service 30 men a day for 7 days a week, and these numbers are not exaggerations.

She never sees the outside of that brothel. That's her life.

This is Jyoti now. She is no longer being horrifically abused day after day inside a brothel. She was rescued by IJM. International Justice Mission believes they are Christ's eyes willing to see the suffering of others, they are the feet of Christ called to GO they are the hands of Christ called to labor – to go to those places others aren't willing to GO – Called to be the feet and hands of Christ setting the captives free- IJM was able to gather evidence, get police help, raid that brothel and get Jyoti out.

They were able to get Jyoti in a safe house where she got counseling. Jyoti wanted to learn about this Jesus whose love and compassion compelled his followers to risk their own lives to set her free.

So transformed by the power of this love, this love that can overcome evil, Jyoti went to IJM and said, "I want to go back. I want to go back because I know where other children are being held. So let's go raid that brothel and get them out."

So this teenage girl whose heart is filled with compassion for girls just like her found the courage in Christ's love to lead a police raid with IJM to rescue 24 more girls who were living the most horrific nightmare you can imagine.

One of the girls that they rescued was a girl named Kalindi, Kalindi said to them, "I know where there are more."

So Kalindi led IJM on a third raid that rescued 24 more children out of this underground dungeon where they were living the most horrific nightmare you can imagine.

When these children were rescued they were set free from a living hell,

Placed in a safe place, where they could experience the love of God in a tangible way, and their future, their precious future could begin. Compassion is the womb of God where new life is possible.

Dave Batstone is a professor of ethics at the University of San Francisco. He went on a research trip to Phnom Penh in Cambodia wanting to explore how human trafficking worked.

He went to a brothel in Cambodia that specialized in 11 and 12 year old girls. He teamed up with IJM to go in and shut that place down. The only way to get inside was to go in and pretend they were customers, and so that's what they did with hidden cameras.

They go up these stairs into this back room, and Dave said, "The door opens, and here are seven couches all around the room. On those couches are these tiny 11 and 12 year old girls. Children. (Imagine if one of these 11 year old girls was your child, your grandchild, your niece).

The owner of the brothel says they can have two girls for the night for \$20. They caught it all on tape. It took four months, but they shut that place down.

It was a watershed moment for Dave because that night he just couldn't sleep. Compassion was stirring in the deepest part of him. He went from someone who just wanted to report on the situation to someone who felt compelled to change the situation. Because of the compassion he felt – he had to do something.

So he started "Not For Sale." Not for Sale builds safe houses for girls like Jyoti who have been rescued out of slavery.

At the safe houses, the girls receive care, counseling and seamstress training.

Not for Sale bought an apparel factory so they can train these women to be seamstresses and employ them at a fair wage. Isn't this awesome!

The Hebrew word for compassion is the womb of God – It is in and through compassion that new life begins – not just for those who suffer but for those who “suffer with” as well – Because when we open our hearts to compassion we begin living our true purpose – We discover our true nature our soul finds it power.

Jesus, who came to set the captives free – said to his followers “By the power of the Spirit, the Spirit of Compassion, you will do greater things than me.” Do we believe that? What would happen if we really believed that?

Our theme for the year is TO LOVE LIKE Jesus – We want to invite you to wear these blue bracelets – that say To Love Like Jesus – The purpose of the bracelets is to get our attention – that we might practice an intention-

Every month this year we will introduce a different prayer practice – It will be in the bulletin – there will be little cards at the welcome center you can take with you to remind you.

For the month of October – We are reminded that we are able to love because God first loved us. We are the children of God's heart. God's unconditional love revealed in Jesus and compassion beats within our hearts and flows through our veins.

The blue bracelet is to remind you to contemplate that love every day that we might be transformed by that love and carry and live that love. To pray every day throughout the day, As you breathe in – in me  
As you breathe out – through me

In me -

Through me -

True freedom comes from knowing we are loved and we are love!  
May our hearts be filled with compassion. May our community be defined by compassion. May our lives be changed by compassion. May the world be healed by compassion. Christ has no body but ours. Christ has no hands . . . no feet but ours, We are the eyes through which Christ looks at the world with compassion.

May it be so!