

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

22nd May 2022 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

JOHN 5:1-9

LOVING COMPASSION

Have you ever either missed out on doing something, or nearly missed out on doing something, because your previous experience or your preconceived ideas told you that it would be too hard, not worth it, too messy, unproductive, or whatever other excuse you came up with? Did you later either look back with regret and think to yourself, ‘maybe that was worth giving a try’, or perhaps you were lucky enough to have someone with you who pushed you through your excuses and made you do it anyway, and whether the results were about enjoyment, or a business or employment opportunity, or some change in your personal life, you are very glad you did? Have you ever had the experience where your first reaction of ‘no’ either could have or did stop you from doing something which could have been good for you?

A number of years ago, when our children were all still young and at home, we went on a nine-week camping trip from Alice Springs up to the top of Western Australia, then right down the WA coast, across the Nullarbor and back up to Alice. It was 12,000 kilometres in nine weeks, and a really great family holiday. One of the many places we spent a few nights at was the town of Exmouth, roughly 2/3 up the WA coast, right on the point of the bit which sticks out on the map. One of the attractions in Exmouth is that because it has a warm ocean current running past it, it has a lot of sea life; great fishing, whale sharks, and the Ningaloo reef which runs very close to the shore. One day we were driving in the National Park which runs along the shoreline, and at a beach we stopped at we saw people snorkelling in the little bay there. We got to talking to some people, and they told us that the reef there was about 10 metres off the shore, you could easily see it, it was only in about waist deep water, and if we drove to the nearby National Parks office, we could hire snorkelling gear for the family.

What a great opportunity! But I will confess that my reaction when Karen and the kids said, 'let's do it', was, 'no'. As much as I have always loved snorkelling, I could only think of all the mess in the car from the kids hopping back in afterwards wet and with sand all over them. Thankfully, Karen didn't take my 'no' for an answer, and we went and did it and we all loved it. We could walk out to the reef and literally just drift down along it on the body boards we had with us. With clown fish and large anemones, and many other reef fish there, the kids thought they were in the *Finding Nemo* movie. For me, it was one of the highlights of a great nine-week holiday. But, if it had been up to me, we never would have done it, because my first reaction was, 'no', too hard, too messy, not worth it.

Sometimes, when we say 'no' straight up we can miss out on what might be possible for us. At those times it can be good to have someone to reach out to us and help us through our initial reluctance.

What happened to me that day, and what has perhaps happened to you at some time, is similar to what we have going on in this Gospel story. While He is in Jerusalem one time Jesus goes and visits a pool which is built around a spring. It was believed that the waters of this spring had healing powers, particularly when they are stirred up from the spring which feeds them. From what we can work out, we guess that about once a day the waters bubbled up from the spring below, there is a suggestion that people believed this was the work of an angel, and from what the man in this story says the belief was that the first person to get into the waters after they started bubbling would be miraculously healed.

When Jesus comes to this pool which is built around the spring, He sees a man who is crippled, and something about him draws Jesus to go and speak to him. What then follows is a miracle which is quite different from other miracle accounts we have. First of all, when Jesus speaks to the man and says, 'Do you want to be healed?', what is his reaction? From other miracle stories we would expect someone who is approached by Jesus in this way to ask for help, or to confess their faith. This man, we know, doesn't even at this time know who Jesus is. What is his

first reaction: ““Sir, I don't have anyone to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up. I try to get in, but someone else always gets there first.” (v.7) It's too hard. The kids will get sand in the car. I've tried it all before and it just doesn't work. When speaking with Jesus and being offered loving compassion by the One who has more of it to offer than anyone else, he straight away puts up the negative block. He knows he has been sick for 38 years. For we don't know how long he's been coming to this healing pool every day in the hope of healing, but with no friends to help him he has no hope of getting in the water at the time it was believed healing can occur. 'I want to be healed, but it can't be done'.

Again, no confession of faith, no request for help, he has no idea who Jesus is at this time. Compassion is defined as feeling sorry for someone in need, and wanting to help them. In loving compassion Jesus says to this man, “Pick up your mat and walk!” (v. 8) And he does. He has been sick and crippled for 38 years, but with just the words of Jesus He is immediately healed. I bet he is pleased that Jesus didn't listen to him about how hard and impossible his healing was!

Sometimes we find it hard to see what is being offered to us, even when it is right in front of us, because our previous experiences and preconceptions get in the way, even of God's work. Our immediate response of 'no' or 'it's too hard' can even block us from the loving compassion which God wants to show us through Jesus.

The discussion between Jesus and this man went along the lines of, 'Do you want to be healed?' 'Well of course I do, but I don't think you realise how difficult that is.' 'Get up and walk.' Done.

What is Jesus saying to us, to you, what is He offering in his loving compassion but which our first doubtful reaction is making it hard for us to receive it? 'Do you want to be forgiven?' I do, Lord, but I don't know that even you can remove my guilt for what I have done. 'Do you want to forgive that person?' Yes I do, but there is no way I can put aside the hurt and pain I feel. 'Do you want me to lead and guide you in that relationship?' Mmm, I don't know that even your help is going to make any difference there. 'Do you want to rediscover the purpose in your life, the

hope you have lost, the meaning of what it's all about?' 'Do you want my strength in helping you through what you are facing?' Well, yes, I do, God, but I really don't see how you can help me out this time.

And, even for us as a group, as a congregation, how do we respond to what Jesus asks us: 'Do you want to find the purpose of why you are here?' 'Do you want to be my hands showing my loving compassion to the world and your community?' 'Do you want to be a community in which everyone feels accepted, loved, forgiven, and valued?' Do we see the blockages, find the excuses, allow our doubts to stop us from taking up His call and missing out on what is possible with God's help? Do we straight away think that, well, we've been sitting by this pool for a long time and it can't be done, or do we trust the One who gives us this call, take up our mat and walk with Him?

From what is a bit of an obscure, and not much talked about, miracle story, we learn a lot about Jesus' loving compassion for all people, and about how He can and does work in our lives, sometimes despite us. Because of the cross we know that Jesus has a heart of love for us, and that this comes out in the way He shows His compassion for us. Jesus' loving compassion changes everything, even when we are a bit slow on the uptake. May we look to Him, trust Him, and follow His call so that we fully experience all He offers us to in our lives now. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Think about/discuss with the people with you, any times you have chosen not to do something because your previous experience or preconceived ideas told you it wasn't a good idea. Do you regret your reluctance and now wish you had done it?
- What callings/opportunities/invitations does God place before you that you are sometimes reluctant to take up, listen to, or follow? Is your reluctance to do something currently preventing God from making the difference in your life which He wants to make?
- Pray, asking God to help you to both listen to and follow His call to you. Ask Him to help you to not see the difficulties and obstacles, but instead to trust Him and listen to His calling in your life.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
22.05.2022*