

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

18th July 2021 – Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

MARK 6:30-34, 53-56

COMPASSION: GOD’S LOVE IN ACTION

“What the world needs now, is love, sweet love. It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of Not just for some, but for everyone’. Now try and get that old tune out of your heads! Those are the well-known lyrics of a song which was first released back in 1965, but whose lyrics and main sentiment can be applied to any time, including our own. If we read or watch or listen to the news, we see both many good examples of love being shown in the world, but also many cases where more love and care is needed. We see love, we see concern, we see people reaching out to help one another. But we also see anxiety, we see conflict, we see sickness and dying. We see cases where people are either unwilling to help, or where they are unable to help.

We can say with Jackie De Shannon, and others who have recorded that song, that what the world needs now is love, sweet love. But love by itself is, really, just a feeling, an emotion. It is a good thing, but if it just stops at the ‘feeling’ point it doesn’t actually do anything to help anyone or to make a difference in any way. Love can provoke or move us to feel and show pity, sympathy, care. It can also lead us to feel relief that ourselves or our loved ones aren’t going through what the person we are expressing love towards is experiencing. The world does need love, always has, always will. At the moment what is happening with us, so close to us with all the anxiety and stress caused by a large portion of our population in lockdown right now, means this love, care and support is needed as much as ever. Love not just for some, but for everyone.

The Gospel reading we have for today is in two different parts which are separated by Jesus doing what these readings talk about. In both parts a large crowd of people come to Jesus because they need His help, and they believe He can help them. In both of them even though Jesus and His disciples are tired, and dealing with a lot of people at this time isn’t what Jesus had planned, He helps them. The key phrase which talks about both what goes on here, and the two miracles which occur in the middle,

is: “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” (v. 34a NIV) Jesus didn’t just *feel* love, He *had* compassion.

Compassion here is moving on from love, it’s what comes from love. In Jesus’ case, and for us as Christians, compassion is grounded and based in God’s love for us. One of the best-known verses of the Bible, John 3:16, says, ‘for God so loved the world’. That is fine, and lovely, and encouraging. But if it just stops there it doesn’t do anything for us. In that well known verse it goes on to say, ‘so He gave His one and only Son so that whoever has faith in Him will not die but have eternal life’. Love sees. Love feels. Compassion acts. Mark tells us about how Jesus’ love because active compassion by teaching people about God’s love, then providing food for over 5,000 people and saving His disciples from a storm, and then in the second half of this reading healing all the sick who were brought to Him. For Jesus, love becomes action as He showed people compassion in very real and practical ways.

We experience God’s love. That’s something we talk about a lot. We experience it through the forgiveness and life we have through Jesus which are referred to in John 3:16. We experience it in the many blessings we have in our lives now. We experience it in the hope and peace of knowing we have eternal life with God. God’s love in action, compassion, is something which is in us. God calls us now not to just reach out our hands to receive this compassion from Him, but also that we now become God’s hands at work in the world, the way that His compassion goes out to others. God’s compassion, God’s love in action, is now at work both in and through us.

We learn, from both this reading and many other parts of the Bible which talk of God’s love and compassion being shown to us, that there are three parts to how this happens, how it comes out. The first part is that compassion is seeing, or noting. This is the part where the feeling of love and concern come up, the feelings which hopefully later become practical love. For years aid agencies like World Vision and Care Australia have said that their big challenge is to get people to not just change the channel when an ad comes on about a famine in Africa, or another disaster needing aid. As people, sometimes we overlook the needs, or look past them, or turn away. Needs are all around us, we know that. There are plenty of needs in countries overseas. There are plenty of needs in our country and state.

There are plenty of needs in the people we who are in our lives, at all levels. Do we really see, and notice, these needs, so that we feel love and concern for those people, feelings which can then move us on to action?

These feelings then move us to caring – for everyone. To bring that song from the beginning back into your heard, ‘not just for some, but for everyone’. Christian compassion is defined by love, care and help being shown to everyone, indiscriminately. That’s how God treats us, loving us all equally, sending Jesus to die for the whole world, and that’s how He calls us to show compassion to others. After a large tsunami hit and devastated parts of Indonesia on Boxing Day 2004, Australian Lutheran World Service launched a special appeal to help the hundreds of thousands of people affected by that disaster. I promoted that appeal among the staff of the College I was pastor in at that time. One of our staff members, who certainly saw himself as a strong Christian, came to me with a concern over whether if he donated money it would just go to Christians in Indonesia, or would Muslims be helped as well. That is just so wrong, which is why I remember it. We are called to show care, compassion, as we are able, to everyone, regardless of their race, their religion, their politics. Thank God He doesn’t differentiate when it comes to showing compassion to us. It’s that same indiscriminate caring He is now calling us to pass on to others.

And, for the practical, and hardest bit, compassion is acting in mercy. The bit we struggle with. Showing compassion happens in so many ways. It is in giving to people overseas, and in our country, from what we have been given. How much do we give, and who do we give to? That’s something for us to pray about and to honestly bring before God as we consider it. Living out Christian compassion, having God’s love come through us in our actions, is also something we can do in many everyday ways. It’s being prepared to forgive people rather than carry and bear a grudge, and to support and encourage when we can. It’s praying for those we know in need. It’s, like Jesus does here, being a witness to God’s love for those who don’t know it, perhaps just in the way we live our lives. In the current situation we are in here in Australia, showing compassion is following what our government tells us to do so we can minimise lockdowns and the effects of COVID. Compassion is reaching out to those who are

suffering, who are lonely, who are doing it hard in any way. Compassion is touching base with people from our Church family, making sure they all know they are important to us, reaching out in any way we can. Compassion is looking to build up, rather than bring down. To bring together, rather than drive apart. Compassion is acting in mercy. We know we can't fix or even begin to address every need in our world or around us, but we can ask God to move us love to look for and see those needs which we can address.

“Jesus had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd”. ‘What the world needs now, is love, sweet love.’ God’s love and compassion, by His grace which we do not deserve in any way, is in us. Now, as His people, His hands in the world, our call is to let it show through us. To see all people and their needs as God sees them, and to act when and as we can. We can be so thankful that God’s love does come out in the action of compassion. We can each pray for the strength, mercy and wisdom to allow God’s compassion to come out in our actions also. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

God’s Love In Action, In us:

The Bible tells us many times, and we both see it around us and experience it in our lives, that God’s love is not just a feeling, but that He shows it to us and to the world.

- Reflect and share about how God shows His love to you. What blessings do you receive from Him in your life each day?
- Do we always see or acknowledge that the good things which happen to us come from God? If we don’t, how can we help ourselves to be more conscious of this?
- Take some time to quietly reflect on these things, to give thanks to God for all you have, and to ask Him to help you be actively aware of the love He shows you each day.

God’s Love In Action, In us:

As we know and experience God’s love, He now calls us to live that love out in the compassion we show to others.

- Compassion is Seeing: take time to stop and think about all the needs that are around you. Do you see them all, or do you look past some? Ask God to help you see the needs which are on the news and in the lives of those around you.
- Compassion is Caring for Everyone: are there any intolerances, prejudices, hurts or grudges, resentments, which are preventing you from showing others the same unconditional compassion God shows to you? If so, hand them over to God and ask for His help and strength to put them aside.
- Compassion is Acting in Mercy: with so many needs around us, at all levels, it can be hard to know who to help and to what degree. Consider the needs you see, consider what you have, pray to God for a decision and response which is loving and caring towards others and yourself.

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18.07.2021*