

Children's sermon (compassion)

(What is) your compassion quotient? Do you have one? The measure of one's compassion has to do with awareness of life's issues. If you've never been hungry, you may not be moved by the great need the hungry of Tucson face. If you have never been treated unjustly, you may not be moved by the cry for justice to be served. If you have always had good health, understanding cancer's presence might be hard.

I believe one's compassion is not only genuine because of experience, but I believe compassion (is a) spiritual-gene that God uses to connect us with the plight of our neighbors. What is your compassion quotient?

It has long been apparent that New Spirit, and Spanish Trail Lutheran before that has a high compassion quotient. For the most part you recognize the needs of the hungry, the homeless, the down-trodden, and those who travel this journey of life and faith....alone.

The readings for today do lay before us God's call to compassion as people of faith. The 146th (Psalm) proclaims God's value of justice for a very specific group of people. God calls for justice to be practiced toward widows, orphans, and aliens in your borders. This is one of those Sundays where we need to repeat to ourselves: if God's concern is justice for the poorest and lowliest, (is that) something important to me? What is your compassion quotient? Is justice for all.... important?

Two widows are faced with life challenging circumstances. Elijah's encounter is way revolutionary. To understand why, you have to have a basic understanding of Israel's history. (After) God had delivered the people of Israel into the Promised Land, their attentions were soon drawn away from the providence of God which had led them to the land of promise. They became enamored with a certain nationalism. They (demanded) God allow them to have a king (2) (3)and despite God's really (good) reasons to refrain from a human monarchy....the people got what they wanted. (Kings.) And those kings were simple men liable to the lure of the quest for wealth and power. I am so glad we don't have to worry about that in 2018.

(Those) kings of Israel were turned toward the quest for national wealth and power. Nationalism was alive and well in the book of 1 Kings, and Elijah's king whose name was Ahab and queen Jezebel were Baal worshippers. (Baal) will make us wealthy beyond our dreams. That spirit swept through the 12 tribes.....everybody wanted to be rich and powerful. From God's standpoint that was a pretty sad thing.

So God does a crazy thing. God sends Elijah not to the palace of the king, no, God (sends) him to Syria, a foreign country where God was about to bless the life of a widow. Could it be that God finds something redeemable among those detestable foreigners? Well, yeah.

There was a terrible drought in the middle east at that time, and the economy of Syria was broken. Elijah goes where God sends him, to the village of Zarephath and he (meets) an emaciated woman....skin and bones, starving to death because there was no food. She is so skinny! Elijah asks for a drink of water, and then asks her to give him her last bit of food. The ask is as unethical as you can get.....give me what I want, first....then you'll get yours. That's pretty much the same world we live in, isn't it?

If you have never been poor or hungry it might be hard to relate to her immediacy. My son and I will eat it and we will die. God says...trust me.

Through foolishness, or wanton hope she does. She becomes a model of faithfulness, one that Israel cannot grasp at that time.

(Who) do you know that is hungry?

(The) widow that Jesus watches at the Temple has had her story told out of context forever. For years she was used as the model for sacrificial giving, guilt-tripping church members to give more. But, that is not the context of the story. That begins earlier in the chapter. Jesus is struggling with the “holier than thou” attitude of the temple scribes.

In that day, if a man, a husband died....the wife had no right to the home. Women were considered property themselves, so they could not own property. So, when a man died, (a nice) man from the church was identified to assist the widow settle the estate. Sounds reasonable, doesn't it? Well that man, (a scribe), would connect with a Sadducee who would buy the house for a much reduced price. The scribe would get his 70% finder's fee, and giving 25% to the temple, and 5% to the widow. Then she would be removed from the home. It was common practice, a practice that Jesus was very familiar with.

(Who do) you know who needs justice? If you have never been a victim of injustice it can be hard to find compassion for the likes of that widow. While Jesus did say the woman gave her last two cents, he was lambasting the system that allowed that kind of treatment under the guise of being “faithful and of God.” The story will then be completed in next Sunday's Gospel reading when the disciples will express awe in the majesty of the temple buildings. Jesus' consternation with the system that starves widows while millions of dollars were spent on the upkeep of opulent buildings and their trappings.

A very similar system is at work in (this) country. Millionaires and billionaires are rewarded with vast sums of money in tax cuts and bonuses....while citizens are bankrupted because medical care is not affordable. Those same millionaires will applaud closed borders to prevent (the very) poor from getting a chance at a better life.

The biblical understanding of (justice) is measured by the treatment of three very key groups of people: widows, orphans, foreigners. Imagine (this;) the life expectancy of a male in Jesus day was mid to late 30's. Since he would have to train in his trade before he could marry, he was probably 24 or 25 when he married his wife who would have been 12 or 13 years old. So, a man might be married for ten years before he died....and his (widow) would then be how old? (24.) And since she could not own property, she could only work with whatever her skills, or most likely become a prostitute....servicing the (very) Sadducee who had stolen her home. If you have never experienced injustice it may not mean much to you....but to that woman, and women of every generation they know that story all too well.

So, what are we to do? (Develop) your compassion. Be aware of the world around you. Give a damn....about your neighbor.

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