

Compassion

Last week I introduced the concept of the Theology of Friendship.

Following the Biblical concept of friendship, words like forgiveness, generosity, kindness, and compassion are essential in a friendship that is genuine and authentic.

What words come to mind when you hear the word compassion? /

What synonyms might you use for compassion? /

What does compassion look like in your day to day life? /

Sometimes the word compassion gets interchanged with empathy but they are not the same.

Compassion is the ability to recognize the suffering of others and then **take action to help**. Compassion is the tangible expression of love for those who are suffering. Compassion creates a desire to help.

Empathy on the other hand is our feeling of awareness toward other people's emotions and an attempt to understand how they feel ...

Taking action is not necessarily part of empathy.

How do you rate yourself when it comes to **Compassion** as opposed to

Empathy?

The Bible has a great deal to say about compassion. Certainly Jesus' ministry was compassion centered. He saw the sick, the infirmed, the marginalized, the physical and spiritually impoverished. He had **sympathy** and **empathy** for them, but then He took action.

Compassion.

The prophet Isaiah says, "For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones."

Two of the most powerful examples of compassion among many, are found in Matthew. The first one comes from chapter 14.

Jesus needed to take care of himself. He was exhausted physically and emotionally. His dear friend John the Baptist had recently been

beheaded and the news laid heavy upon him. Herod's wife decided it would be fitting to give her husband the head of John the Baptist on a platter as a birthday present.

We can only imagine how difficult that news was for Jesus to hear. So he withdrew in a boat, heading to a deserted place to have some time alone in his own grief. But the crowds from the local time found out that he was on the lake. They travelled on foot to the shore where he would land. Matthew says, "He saw a great crowd, and he had **compassion** for them."

But his disciples had other ideas, "The hour is late, this is a deserted place, send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." How do you think Jesus responded?

"They don't need to go away; give them something to eat."

Scripture says that there were 5,000 men there as well as many women and children. You know how the story goes ... 5 loaves of bread, 2 fish,

and at the end of the evening, a crowd with full bellies. That is what compassion looks like!

In chapter 20, leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Jesus. Two blind men were sitting by the side of the road. When they heard that Jesus was passing by they began to shout, “Lord have mercy on us.” The crowd, it seems, had neither empathy nor compassion. They shouted at the two men to keep quiet. “Don’t bother Jesus.”

But they were not deterred. They shouted even louder.

Jesus stopped. “What do you want me to do for you?”

“Lord let our eyes be opened.”

And then Matthew says, Jesus was moved with compassion.

Compassion is an action word. Jesus reached out and touched their eyes. Immediately, not only could they see, but they responded by following Jesus.

Scripture is filled with acts of compassion. Kindness, generosity, sympathy, empathy, forgiveness ... not just in theory, but in action.

Faith itself is an action word. The book of James reminds us that faith without works is dead.

James chapter 2, beginning at verse 14 says,

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good^[a] is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

Love in action. Compassion, not just a desirable quality to possess, it is an action word.

Compassion is an important aspect of the Theology of Friendship but it goes beyond that. When lived well, it touches our families, our friends

our colleagues, our neighbours, but also the lives of strangers, people whose names we will never know, faces that we might never see.

Compassion knows no bounds.

God bless you on your journey, as you model the life of Jesus, filled with compassion and willing to express that into the life of others.

Amen.