

Sunday 25th August 2019 Compassion
Isaiah 58:9-14 Luke 13:10-17

Welcome to Ava, Jemma, Darren, Anna family & friends

Another encounter with Jesus on the Sabbath day - a day that was full of rules and obligations for 1st Century Jews

They were in the synagogue - a place of worship
This poor woman appeared who was bent double. Everyone could see her
Maybe everyone knew her - had seen her around

Luke - a doctor - tells us that she had a spirit that crippled her for 18 years
Another translation says that she was seriously handicapped
Another says that she had a spirit of weakness
It probably means that there was no known medical explanation for what was wrong with her
But she was bent over double and could not stand up straight

And then starts an unspoken power struggle between the leader of the synagogue who would have been officially in charge of the meeting and Jesus who sees this poor woman and takes control of the situation but calling her over, speaking to her, laying hands on her and healing her.

The leader's immediate response is praise and rejoicing with the woman!
NO! His immediate response is something quite different. He responds immediately with indignation and keeps telling the crowd to come on any of the other 6 days of the week to get their healing but Not on a Sabbath day.
The synagogue leader feels upstaged and responds with anger, telling the crowd the rules!
You've got to keep the rules. There are 6 days of the week when you can come and get healed.

The Sabbath is the day for rest and not doing work of any kind. Healing was work for doctors and the laying on of hands, resulting in healing on the Sabbath, was not on!!!!

The unspoken power struggle between the leader and Jesus, was about what was 'allowed' and what Jesus passionately knew He had to do if he was to act with love and compassion for this woman.

His response to the leader says it all
You hypocrites - you people of double standards. You care for your animals on a Sunday by untying your ox or donkey and leading it to water. So why not this woman, a daughter of Abraham - a true believer? Why is it wrong for her to be set free?

Oxford Diocese vision is to become a more Christ-like church, growing in courage, contemplation and compassion

A version of Jesus response to the synagogue leader that I read this week went like this

You don't leave your animals tied up on the Day of Rest. You untie them and let them drink don't you? How blind can you be? If you're willing to bend the rules for an animal how can you deny this woman, one of your own people, release from satan's grip just because its a day of rest. Your pettiness and lack of compassion beggars belief!! (Paul Langham)

There is this big unspoken power struggle going on with the leaders in the synagogue and as we know from other stories of things that happened on the Sabbath, the strict Jewish leaders were ready to take Jesus to task over anything they could to assert their authority and discredit Jesus. If it wasn't this healing it was complaining that his followers picked grains of wheat to eat from the fields or they did not follow the correct eating rules or....

But for Jesus what was most important was his love and compassion for this poor woman. The compassionate prompting in his heart meant that he could not ignore her condition but instead stood beside her and brought healing to her.

And so, if we want to be a more Christlike church then we need to also grow in our compassion

Compassion - empathy, understanding, tender heartedness, gentleness, consideration

The few verses that Darren read from Matthews gospel shows Jesus speaking with compassion about the little children. He called one out to come to him and showed that child respect and recognition and gentleness.

So my question to all of us today is how compassionate are we... really?

How well do we show consideration and tender heartedness to others? Are we growing more like Jesus in terms of compassion?

Compassion may be demonstrated in so many different ways:

- listening better to those around us and to the wider world
- living out our faith in acts of kindness and generosity
- coming together to feed the hungry and welcome the stranger
- being more tender and gentle with one another, sharing in their burdens
- lovingly offering the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ

I could keep going. Living compassionately is often costly, not necessarily financially but with our time, our energy, our reputation

Jesus didn't get in to an all out, overt power struggle with the leaders who were giving him a hard time. But His reputation with them was constantly battered as He put the needs and cares of others, including the woman bent double in this mornings story, before His own.

Our Archdeacon, Olivia, soon to become bishop of Reading, has written a thought provoking reflection on what it means to be compassionate. You can find it on the Diocesan website if you search compassion. Just a few of her thoughts include...

-being a compassionate Church begins with deep down knowing that we are each loved and precious to God, every single one of us. From Ava, the youngest here today to..... I wouldn't like to mention names of the eldest here today! :-)

-being a compassionate Church means letting our hearts be broken as we see precious children (of all ages) crying out in despair, hunger, sorrow and pain, resulting in prayer but also practical help and action

-being a compassionate church means welcoming the stranger, the outsider, the one who is different knowing that our lives will be enriched through their friendship.

Jesus demonstrated the ultimate in compassion from the cross, where his infinite love was poured out for His world, for each and everyone of us. His perfect love and compassion mean that we can each come to Him and receive His love and life as we receive His forgiveness and learn to trust in Him. It is because of that that Anna has been Christened today

And we as His people and His Church need to absorb into our souls His love and compassion, allow it to change us and to then stand with all whose burdens are heavy, and share them as we strive for mercy, peace and freedom. And then we shall become a more Christ-like Church

Amen