

Compassion Luke 7:11-17
Sunday 5th June 2016

Recap

Last week Pat asked in her sermon what we might put on the CV of the Roman centurion who sent some Jewish elders to Jesus, asking him to heal the centurion's servant.

I think Jesus would have put FAITH at the top of that Centurion's CV
Jesus said to the centurion that 'never have I found such faith, even in Israel'

Today we see not just healing but a boy raised from death to life. But interestingly there is no mention of faith.

Let's take a look at the scene that Luke describes for us in today's reading... this is where I wish I was a bit of an artist because I would love to sketch this as I speak!

Jesus & crowd

Not long after the healing Luke tells us that Jesus went to a town called Nain

Jesus + disciples + a large crowd of hangers on
From outside they are all approaching the gate to enter Nain
Remember that most of the towns of that time had walls built around them for defence and there were a few gates in each wall that could be shut at night or when defence was needed.

So Jesus and his friends and a large crowd were heading towards the entrance to the town

You can imagine the atmosphere...

Lots of CHATTERING
EXCITEMENT after just hearing about the servant being healed
WONDER at what was going on
HOPE for what might be to come
LIFE & ENERGY emanating from all those in that crowd

You can imagine the buzz in the atmosphere
Here in our story from Luke these 2 crowds meet

Widow & mourners

Meanwhile, inside the town is a widow - a lady whose husband has already died

And now her son has also died

So she and a crowd of mourners are taking the dead boy, in his coffin, out of the town for his burial

You can imagine that atmosphere

Loud WAILING

Deep SADNESS and DESPAIR

Inexplicable SUFFERING

DEATH & FEAR for the future

We may realise the sadness the loss of her son would mean

The grief that would entail

But think for a moment

Her husband has already died

And now her only son has also died

That means that as well as her loss and grief she now also faces a future with no means of economic support, no security, no male in her family to provide protection

She would immediately become vulnerable and excluded, and probably find herself alienated and marginalised

Try to imagine the tragedy in the atmosphere

A couple of years ago there was a tragic death of an 18 year old boy in our parish. He had worked over the summer and was about to go off to university. But coming home from town late one night he fell into the river and drowned.

He had 3 older sisters but being a Pakistani family he held an extra special place in his mum's heart

The funeral was held in Bath Abbey because of the number of people I shall never forget the atmosphere as we waited inside for the start of the service

The sole drum beat

The distraught wailing of his mum....

The HOPE and EXCITEMENT and LIFE of the crowd with Jesus
The DESPAIR and GRIEF and DEATH of the crowd with the woman

Both crowds meeting near the city gate
One entering in and the other leaving PAUSE

What happens?

What happens when these 2 crowds meet?

Jesus hears and sees the grief and vulnerability of the woman and had compassion for her.

One translation said when Jesus saw her 'his heart broke' His heart went out to her His heart overflowed with sympathy

So he spoke to her - Do not weep (vs 13)

Then he went forward and touched the bier - the coffin (vs 14)

And said to the young man - who was dead and about to be buried - Young man, I say to you, rise! (vs 14)

On every level this is amazing

-There was no plea from the woman or anyone else in the crowd for healing. No faithful request like we heard last week from the Centurion

-Jesus showed compassion and emotion when he saw what was happening - signs of weakness back in the day, and still today, but an integral part of Jesus ministry and Gods Kingdom

-Jesus touched the coffin - that would have instantly made him ritually unclean

-And then he spoke to the dead boy who immediately sat up and began to speak

Jesus had great COMPASSION for the woman and took ACTION

And then Vs 15 says Jesus gave him to his mother The meaning of 'gave him' also means entrusted - he was back in the care of his mum

And the crowd - not sure which one but probably both - were filled with awe (caught / seized with respect / terror / reverence)

They praised God and went and told everyone what had happened.

Jesus, filled with great compassion took action and redeemed the broken relationship, the pain and suffering

And turned DEATH & DESPAIR into LIFE & HOPE

That is what the message of Jesus is all about. That is what the Kingdom of God is all about Redemption and new HOPE and new LIFE

Jesus saw the widows desperate need and even when she was too torn apart to ask for help, He had compassion and took action

In this story there was the miraculous bringing back to life of that dead boy.

I have never seen a dead person raised to life but I have seen and I know that God is still in the business of miracles and of redeeming broken lives

That may be physically but it may also be emotionally or spiritually

Jesus all those years ago in the city of Nain had great compassion and redeemed the broken widow

In that situation it was actual death back to life

With the young man I mentioned he was not raised to life but his mum and dad, in the deep deep place of unforeseen tragic grief knew God's love and compassion. It is almost a year since I have seen them now and the wounds were still raw but they acknowledged that God was bringing healing to their broken hearts

Jesus was modelling a new order of things. A new order that is on its way but not complete yet
His new order brings life instead of death
healing instead of broken
blessing instead of poverty
joy instead of mourning
hope instead of desolation

He sees our needs, our sorrow, our brokenness even when we try to hide it from others, even when we are too broken to turn to Him
He sees and he reaches out with compassion and he wants to take action

I wonder what some of you have lost? And at what cost?

Where do you feel broken or lost or torn apart?

Jesus wants to extend His compassion to you and bring healing.

He might not take the situation back to what it was before. But He will redeem it.

What act of compassion are you in need of today?

Some of us may not resonate with that today, maybe we will in the future. Remember - it is never too late

But where then do we show compassion and then take action?

How do we show love and compassion to the marginalised? the vulnerable? the excluded? the alienated?

Not just hypothetically but in real action?

Jesus saw the situation

Had compassion

And acted

Redeeming the pain and suffering and the relationship that had been broken

And, as His body here on earth, He wants to do the same both in and through us today.