

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
3rd Sunday in Lent
March 20 2022
Scripture: Psalm 145: 1-12; Matthew 20:29-34

Sermon: A Compassionate Heart

Thursday, March 17, was St. Patrick's Day. The man who would come to be known as St. Patrick, apostle of Ireland, was born in Britain in 386AD, not Ireland.

Surprisingly, Patrick was not raised with a strong Christian upbringing. Education was not stressed during his childhood either.

When Patrick was 16 years old, he was captured by Irish pirates. They brought him to Ireland where he was sold into slavery. There his job was to tend sheep. Patrick's master was a high priest of Druidism, worshipping the sun and earth and is a Pagan sect that held major influence over the country at the time.

Patrick came to view his enslavement as God's test of his faith. During his six years of captivity, he became deeply devoted to Christianity through constant prayer. In a vision, he saw the children of pagan Ireland reaching out their hands to him, and he grew increasingly determined to convert the Irish people to Christianity someday.

Around 408AD the idea of escaping enslavement came to Patrick in a dream, in which a voice promised him he would find his way home to Britain. Eager to see the dream materialize, Patrick did escape and convinced some sailors to let him board their ship. Patrick ultimately was reunited with his family.

A free man once again, Patrick went to France, where he studied and entered the priesthood under the guidance of the missionary St. Germain. He was ordained a deacon around 418AD.

As time passed, he never lost sight of his vision to convert Ireland to Christianity. St. Patrick was motivated by his compassion for the people and children. He wanted them to know Jesus. In 432AD he was ordained as a bishop and was soon sent by Pope Celestine I to Ireland to spread the

gospel to non-believers while also providing support to the small community of Christians already living there.

Upon his arrival in Ireland, Patrick was initially met with resistance but managed to spread Christian teachings far and wide, along with other missionaries, through preaching, writing and performing many baptisms. St. Patrick had a compassionate heart and loved the people of Ireland. St. Patrick is honored annually on March 17, the day many believe he died in 461AD, which falls during the season of Lent. For more than 1000 years, the Irish have observed Saint Patrick's Day as a religious holiday.

Another well known person is Saint Francis of Assisi, born in Assisi, Italy in 1182. He grew up leading a privileged life as the son of a wealthy cloth merchant. About the age of 19, Francis went to battle against the nearby town. Francis was captured and taken prisoner. He was held prisoner in a dungeon for a year before his father paid the ransom and he was set free.

Francis began to see visions from God that changed his life. He had a vision that told him to help the sick. Finally, when praying in a church, Francis heard God tell him to "repair my church, which is falling in ruins." Francis gave all his money to the church. Francis left his father's home and took a vow of poverty.

The Franciscan Order was eventually formed and Francis lived his life in poverty and preached to people about the life of Jesus Christ. By 1209, he had around 11 followers. He had one basic rule, which was "To follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps."

Mother Theresa founded the Missionaries of Charity in 1950. It has over 4,500 nuns and is active in over 133 countries as of 2012. They help those who are dying of HIV/AIDS, leprosy and TB. It also runs soup kitchens, dispensaries, mobile clinics, children and family counseling programs, as well as orphanages and schools. Members take vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience and to give "Wholehearted free service to the poorest of the poor." Mother Theresa served the Lord with a compassionate heart in India and other places around the world.

Here are some famous quotes from Mother Theresa over her years of service:

- "God has identified himself with the hungry, the sick, the naked, the

homeless; hunger not only for bread, but for love, for care, to be somebody to someone; nakedness, not for clothing only, but nakedness of that compassion that very few people give to the unknown; homelessness, not only just for a shelter made from stone but for that homelessness that comes for having no one to call your own.”

- “Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody, I think that is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat.”
- “Let us not use bombs and guns to overcome the world. Let us use love and compassion. Peace begins with a smile—smile five times a day at someone you don’t really want to smile at all—do it for peace. So let us radiate peace ...and extinguish in the world and in the hearts of all men all hatred and love for power.”
- “Have a great compassion for people. To be able to have a heart full of compassion, we need to pray. Especially be kind, be loving to the poor. We think we do so much for the poor, but it is they who make us rich. We are in debt to them Do you want to do something beautiful for God? There is a person who needs you. This is your chance.”
- “We must make our homes centers of compassion and forgive endlessly.
- “In order for us to be able to love, we need to have faith, because faith is love in action and love in action is service. In order for us to be able to love, we have to see and touch. Faith in action through prayer, faith in action through service: each is the same thing, the same love the same compassion.”
- “Religion has nothing to do with compassion; it is our love for God that is the main thing because we have all been created for the sole purpose to love and be loved.”
- “The fruit of love is service, which is compassion in action.”

We need compassion in our world today. We watch the news and our hearts ache for the women and children and families whose lives are suddenly torn apart with this war in the Ukraine, started by a man that has no sense of what the word compassion means.

Compassion means “to suffer with” another person. It is deeper than sympathy or even empathy. It means you truly feel their pain and

are affected by what you see and are with them as they suffer.

Jesus was always moved with compassion for the people! Lost souls and those suffering physically moved Jesus to cry with them and to suffer with them. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost! Jesus came to heal the broken hearted and to bind up their wounds. (*Psalm 147:3*)

Compassion will move you to do something for those who are suffering just as Jesus was moved with compassion to save us by dying on the cross.

Jesus was often moved by compassion for the sick when he healed those who were the outcast of society, those who were unclean, those with leprosy and the woman who was bleeding for 12 years or the girl who died and Jesus came and touched her and she sat up and ate something. Jesus had compassion for the hungry in feeding the 5000 plus. Jesus had compassion for those who were grieving the loss of a loved one, such as Martha and Mary when Lazarus died. The Bible even says that Jesus wept.

Jesus is moved with compassion for the blind. We read in our scripture of many times Jesus heals those who are blind and they receive their sight at his touch. Jesus can touch both the physical and the spiritual blindness.

In our scripture lesson from Matthew 20 we encounter two blind men sitting by the roadside and they called to Jesus.

They got his attention, and he came over to them asking, "What do you want me to do for you?" He wanted them to tell him what they wanted that day. They said, "Lord, we want our sight."

Verse 34 says, "Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him."

Jesus healed these men physically and spiritually. They were now his disciples and they followed him because of his love and compassion for them. They were new creations and wanted to share with others what Jesus did for them and to share with others the compassionate heart of Jesus.

Christ-like compassion moves us to meet the needs of others. Let us ask the Lord to help us become more like Jesus, having a compassionate

heart towards people around us and to pray for those in Ukraine and around the world who are suffering. It isn't easy, because genuine Christ-like compassion will require firm commitment and courage from us.

One reason we lack compassion is that we are so busy with our own pursuits that we fail to take notice of the needs around us.

A story is told about a young executive named Josh who was driving down a street in a Chicago neighborhood. He had a new shiny black car and as he was driving, a brick flew out and hit the side of his car. Josh jumped out and grabbed the kid that threw the brick and pushed him up against the car. He shouted at the young boy, "Why did you throw the brick?" The young boy said, "Please, I'm sorry! I didn't know what else to do. I threw the brick because no one would stop." Tears were dripping down the boy's face as he pointed around the parked car. "It's my brother. He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can't lift him up." "Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He's hurt and he's too heavy for me" said the boy.

Moved beyond words, the young executive lifted the young man back into his wheelchair and took out his handkerchief and wiped the scrapes and cuts, checking to see that everything else was all right. He then walked with them to make sure that the young brother was able to get him back home. It was a long walk back to his new sleek shiny black car—a long and slow walk. Josh never did fix that dent in the side door. He kept it to remind him not to go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at him to get his attention again.

There is the story of Taylor Meehan, an 11-year-old boy, who would go with his mother once a month to serve meals to homeless people. Taylor helped to serve meals to more than 600 people but he wouldn't just serve the meals, he would interact with the people in a loving and compassionate way.

As he brought food to one man, he noticed how the man shivered from the cold. The older man had a thin coat and shoes with holes. Taylor ran to the supply room to find another pair of shoes. He only found a pair of ladies' fuzzy pink slippers. With slippers in hand, he ran back to the shivering man. He quickly stuck his own big feet out and realized he had the same size feet as the older man. Taylor took off his

brand new basketball sneakers and put them on the older man. The older man rubbed his eyes and spoke to Taylor in broken English. He placed his hand softly on Taylor's shoulder, to express his gratitude.

Afterwards, as the young boy helped to clean up, he walked around the hall wearing a pair of women's fuzzy pink slippers and the largest smile, thinking about his newfound friend.

Compassion isn't just about giving; it is about giving something to them that really matters. Jesus always would ask people, "What do you want me to do for you?" Compassion is love in action.

Let us all have a compassionate heart and let us be moved with Christ-like compassion for those who are lost and need the love of Jesus.

Listen to the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved, as to love.

Francis of Assisi

St. Francis also said, "Do all you can to preach the gospel and if necessary, use words."

Jesus is our example of how to reach out with compassion to others. WE are Christ's hands and feet, and WE are his ambassadors who bring His love and hope and compassion. When someone feels as though they are not alone, they will find great comfort and strength.

Jesus told and showed his followers that the world will know we are his disciples by our love and compassion!