

“COMPASSION AND CONCERN”

Exodus 33:17-23; Luke 10:29-37

Yesterday was Valentine’s Day. At some time or other it may have had some association with St. Valentine, whoever he was. In 1969 when the Vatican removed some saints from its calendar, St. Valentine and St. Christopher were two of the saints they expunged. Valentine’s Day has become a time of giving cards, flowers, candy, jewelry, and other mementos to the one you love. In school, the children pass out dozens of Valentines, each one asking “Will you be my Valentine?”

Compassion and concern are a form of love. There are three words in Greek translated as love in English. One of them means “brotherly love” but it isn’t used in the Bible with compassion and concern, the second has the connotation of sexual love, the third one “agape” means “affection, good-will, love, benevolence”. Compassion and concern can develop into agape love.

The English word compassion is formed from the word passion which means to suffer. Compassion means to suffer with. Job’s friends came and sat with him for seven days, they suffered with him. Despite the bad counsel they gave him later, at least they started out right. The word concern comes from the word to mix or mingle. It is the next step after compassion – you allow their suffering to become part of your own interests. To oversimplify – compassion is our emotional response, concern is our intellectual response to human suffering.

“I decline to accept the end of man...I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail...He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.” William Faulkner, *Speech upon receiving the Nobel Prize [December 10, 1950]*

1.) Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." (Exodus 33:19 NKJV)

And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-7 NKJV)

Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. (Psalms 112:4 NKJV)

He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. (Hebrews 5:2 NKJV)

Where does our compassion come from? Faulkner refers to our soul. God made us in His own image, and breathed into us the breath of life and man became a living soul. God's image, includes, as He told Moses, the quality of compassion. We can have compassion because God has compassion and we were made in His image. I say "we can have compassion" because in many instances men and women have suppressed compassion. Compassion comes very naturally to children but often parents will rebuke them and tell them to "stop sniffing," "act like a grown-up." Even adults who have hardened their hearts are overcome by compassion by events like 9/11 or Katrina.

Compassion is strongest in us when the suffering is something we ourselves have suffered. There are wounds that each of us have that never really heal. If you have experienced unemployment, poverty, hunger, cancer, being abused, losing your spouse, losing your house, or any of a number of other personal crises then you can have compassion for someone else in similar straits. One of the reasons God may have allowed you to go through a painful experience or loss and then

comforted and strengthened you through it is so you can have compassion and comfort others whose pain is similar to yours.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NKJV)

The Samaritans were despised by the Jews. When the Samaritan saw the wounded man lying in the road, he may have remembered a time when he himself was attacked. Jesus said to Thomas,

"Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." (John 20:27 NKJV)

God's compassion for us has its source in what Jesus suffered as a human. There is no past, present, and future for God, because God is eternal. The temptations and sufferings the Son of God experienced in His human nature were eternally part of God's complete knowledge.

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:17-18 NKJV)

2.) Concern

Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness-- besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? (2 Corinthians 11:25-29 NKJV)

There is such a thing as "Compassion fatigue." As humans we do not have the capacity to respond to every instance of pain and suffering that we encounter. God has that capacity, and yet He does not have compassion on everyone. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." and "keeping mercy for thousands,

forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty,” Even for God there are guidelines, parameters, boundaries for compassion.

Let me give two examples of what I mean. There was a Presbyterian Church on North Avenue in Baltimore. It had a tremendous youth program that drew high school students from a wide area. It had some exceptional adult Sunday School classes. Its pulpit had always been occupied by men who steadfastly preached the Word of God. They had an active missions program. Their building developed some structural damage. It would have taken all the money they had in savings and endowments and a lot of sacrifice to make the needed repairs. They decided to dissolve their church, and give their money to missions. Today a McDonald’s stands on that site. Their lamp has gone out.

I knew of a minister who had a wife and children. He gave most of his salary to evangelistic work, charities, missions. His wife had to go to their family and friends and other churches begging food for their children and money for heat and utilities.

I don’t mean for anyone to take this sermon as an excuse for doing nothing to help those whom God brings to us for help and comfort.

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:17 NKJV)

Our compassion should lead, as Faulkner said, to sacrifice and endurance. Our heart should guide us in establishing guidelines as to whom and to what extent our compassion will be extended. We then decide that these objects of compassion will be integrated into the other concerns of our life. Our compassion should have endurance.

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7 NKJV)

