

Victory of the Lamb – November 4, 2018 – Imitating God : Living Generously

Passionate about Compassion – Matthew 25:34-40

Eight year old Wyatt spent the whole summer tracking down clues for the First Clover Leaf Bank's of Edwardsville, IL, scavenger hunt. And when the 8-year-old boy learned he'd won the \$1,000 prize, he knew exactly what he was going to do with it. Wyatt gave the entire check to his neighbors because his neighbors had 2-year-old Cara who was diagnosed with leukemia. "He asked 'How much chemo will \$1,000 buy Cara?'" Wyatt told his neighbors that he'd entered the scavenger hunt just for Cara. "I didn't know what I would do with \$1,000," Wyatt said. "But I knew what [they] could do." Compassion.

Today we are continuing our series Imitating God: Live Generously. Last week we saw that God was the first and the most generous giver of all. Every good and perfect gift is from above. Here is an example: There are 25K varieties of orchids. The orchid is just one of 270K species of flowers. God doesn't do things by halves. Scientists tell us that in our galaxy there are 100 billion stars. Our galaxy is 1 of 100 billion galaxies. In a read over line in Genesis the writer says, **"He also made the stars."** (Genesis 1:16) God has given us not only the stars and all we have but the very best, his Son, our Savior. Today we are going to look at compassion.

Matthew 25:34-40 **"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'** We need our eyes open to see God and our eyes open to see our neighbors in need.

What's that look like for you? For so many of us poverty is something we see and hear about on TV. We separate ourselves from these things and hunker down in our homes. We stay away either intentionally or intentionally from messes. So hang with me, and before our time is over I'm going to give you an opportunity to meet the disadvantaged where they are at. God didn't call us to be separate from those in need. Passion – energy excitement Passion of the Christ – suffering Compassion with energy to be with those suffering

A Saint from ancient times wrote:

"Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he looks on this world, You are the feet with which he walks to do good, You are the hands, with which he blesses the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, Yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Your are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

As humans generosity usually flows either from a sense of abundance or a feeling of compassion. God is moved by both all of the time. God's resources can't be exhausted nor can his compassion ever run out.

Our sinful human nature lives from a condition of scarcity. We never got enough love from our parents, enough toys on our birthday or enough affirmation from those who know. Our checking account is limited and often our money is spent before we earn it. Living from a condition of scarcity, we think that we must protect what we have. If we give it away we might end up in dire straits. And so we hold on tightly. Which check it out prevents us not only from giving but receiving more. (Coin illustration)

Spoiler alert for our sinful nature: God wants us to use some of the money he has given us to help people in need. God didn't put us on earth to hoard. Proverbs 28:27 **Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses.** Proverbs 19:17 **Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done.** God wants us to be like him. And he is a giver and a giver of compassion.

Exodus 34:5-7 **Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."** The first thing God tells us about himself is that he is compassionate and gracious. The word order matters here. That God is compassionate and gracious and that is listed first means that this is the main thing, the main characteristic of God. The word compassionate means to love tenderly, to be merciful. The root word in Hebrew also has the meaning of a womb. The protection and the feeling a mom has toward her infant child. Here are a few examples of the use of this word in other places in the Old Testament. There is a perplexing story about two women fighting over a child. Both claim they are the other, but there was no DNA test available at the time, so king Solomon comes up with a different litmus test. He says, Since you guys are fighting over the one child, let's cut the baby in half and you can each have half. Immediately the true mother, **"was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, "Don't kill him!"** (1 Kings 3:26) The prophet Isaiah says **"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you."** (Isaiah 49:15) Can you tell the deepness of God's love for you? If you are a parent, you know there is no love as fierce as that of a mother or father for a child.

The word in Hebrew for gracious is an action word. It means to show grace or show favor. It's something you do. It has the idea of help. To be gracious to them is to help them in time of need. Here is an example of the word used in Exodus 22:26,27. **"If you take a neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, because the cloak is the only covering your neighbor has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am gracious."** So here the word is used for justice for the poor. These two words linked together we have a feeling word and an action word.

God is like a father or mother and we are like his children. It means like a parent God comes to the rescue when his kids need help. When we come before God at worship, work, school, in the hospital or out on a run, or crisis at work, we come before God who cares about us and acts to do something about our situation. God is a caring, loving, compassionate father. He loves you more than you will ever understand or comprehend. Psalm 103:13 **As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him."**

Some of you are here this morning and you have a burning question going on in your heart. You are trying to make sense of a situation that makes no sense. And you are asking the question, Lord, don't you care? Did you see the doctor's report? Don't you care? Do you see the trouble my marriage is in? Don't

you care? Do you see how little money we have in the bank and all the bills we have? Don't you care? I am in a dead end job, don't you care? The answer is "yes." God cares. In fact, he cares more than you care. He wants to help more than you want help more than you know what will help. 1 Peter 5:7 **Cast your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** 1 Peter 5:7

So there is this story that I heard about a number of years ago and I want to mess up your life by inviting you on it. A Pastor was in an airport the day after Christmas. And he picked up a newspaper that gave a synopsis of a local's churches Christmas message. And it began this way, "This morning I want to talk with you about incarnation and children. But let me begin with the comments of a drug dealer to a minister . . . Rev., when a kid gets up in the morning and heads off to school, I am there. When he comes home from school, I am there. When he comes to play, I am there. They know where I am. Rev., where are you?" Hurt is all around, where is the church? Where are we. The church was never meant to be the same as culture but it was never meant to be separate from it either. And that is one of the reasons why I am so excited about what is coming up with our Linked opportunities because we will not be the same nor separate. We will be visible and we will imitate God by being compassionate and meeting people where they are at (Mission statement).

No one can do it all but we all can do something. A pastor came to a new community and was seen crying over the city, all the poverty, all the crime, all the dysfunction, all the systemic problems. A church leader came to him and tried to comfort him by saying, "It is ok, you will get used to it." To which the pastor replied, "that is why I'm crying."

Friends you and I can't save every baby, every marriage, every homeless person but we can be beacon of light, we can be a candle. We aren't God but led by the Holy Spirit living in us can be a candle in the darkness. I have vision in mind of Christ's compassionate loved shining in our community one candle at a time, in your driveway and mine. And I see that whole southeastern Wisconsin becoming bright as we share the Light of the world.

Here is what we need to do: Pray for those in need. Make it personal – don't wait for someone else to get started take personal responsibility, serve right in our proximity. The right time to the right thing is right now. For starters what that looks like is Blood Drive, Toys of Friends of Jesus, OJC.

This is how compassionate God is – when we fail at compassion, he is not deterred, he just shows us more compassion. He keeps piling on compassion until we are saturated so that as we see Jesus pouring out his life for us on the cross we are moved to pour into the lives of others as well. Jesus help us to see you in our lives- help us to see our neighbors in need and be moved by your love so that our neighbors to you in us by your glory and for your glory! Amen.