

COMPASSION

Life groups notes - week beginning 7th February 2016

(5) COMPASSION FOR THE WORLD

'But a Samaritan

- Prayer

A time to open ourselves to God's Spirit and word through time spent together, seeking God's blessing on each other's lives and on the lives of those we touch. You may like to use the prayer of St Benedict again:

*O gracious and holy Father,
give us wisdom to perceive you,
intelligence to understand you,
diligence to seek you,
patience to wait for you,
eyes to behold you,
a heart to meditate upon you,
and a life to proclaim you,
through the power of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- Read Luke 10.25 – 37

- Question (to be explored briefly. Each group member is invited to share.)

Is there a sentence, phrase or word that stands out for you that relates to anything you have heard, seen or experienced this week?

- Exploring the parable

The purpose of the parable of the Good Samaritan is to answer the law expert's question, 'Who is my neighbour?' Luke tells us that the man was seeking 'to justify himself'. He wanted to reduce the commandment of neighbour-love to a reachable limit. It's as if he is saying, 'Come on, now. Be reasonable! You don't mean we have to love everyone like this, do you?' Jesus responds by making a Samaritan and a Jew the two main characters in his story. They were bitter enemies, yet the Samaritan comes to the Jew's aid. Jesus demolishes any limits. Who are we to love in word and deed? The answer is anyone whom you find in need, anyone you find on the road.

- Care for God's people

In the Old Testament the people of God are commanded to care for each other and especially the poor among them (Deut 15.4, 5, 7, 8,10). They were also to look after their relatives (Leviticus 25.25).

Paul agreed (1 Tim.5.8). The New Testament community was just as concerned to care for the poor within it. The famous passages on mercy and compassion (Matthew 25. 35 ff; 1 John 3.17; James 2.15-17) all refer to 'brothers and sisters without food'. Poor widows were cared for (Acts 6.1-7; 1 Tim.5.3-5). In disaster helping needy Christians was a high priority.

We also see in Scripture the state has responsibility for the poor. This is illustrated by Joseph setting up a hunger relief programme for his own nation and all the surrounding ones (Genesis 41.53-57).

- Care for the outsider
The Bible forbids neglecting those outside the church. 'Let us do good to all people.' (Galatians 6.10). So for each of us the ministry of compassion is not just about our fellowship but is also an expression of mission.
- Neighbours
In the parable Jesus is trying to prevent a Jew from confining the ministry of loving deeds to his own race and religious community. Neighbour is anyone. Not all are my brother and sister, but all are my neighbour.
- Strangers
The stranger was a non-Jew who lived in the land of Israel. They were to be recipients of mercy (compassion).
 - in gleaning from the harvest (Leviticus 19.10; 23.22)
 - in being classed with widows and the fatherless (Exodus 22.21)
 Jesus continued this teaching –'I was a stranger and you invited me in'. (Matt.25.35,43)
The writer to the Hebrews exhorts the readers to show hospitality to strangers (Heb.13.2 and see also 1 Tim.5.10).
- Enemies
Jesus particularly commanded us to love our enemy (Matt.5.46; Luke 6.32-36). His ministry included those from outside the community of believers (Matt 4.24; Luke 6.17,18) Jesus' ministry was in 'word and deed' (Luke 24.19) and we are called to do the same (John 20.21).
- Questions
 1. Who is a Samaritan in your life?
 2. Is there anything preventing you from praying for God to use you in a ministry of compassion?
 3. How has God spoken to you through this series on compassion? Are there any changes you have made, or need to make to enable you to 'go and do likewise'? In what ways have you been affirmed or encouraged in your walk with God and your fellow Christians?
- Closing prayer
Turn your discussion into prayer for each other. Pray for those in need and for our response to people's needs.
You may like to use the words below taken from St Patrick's Breastplate:

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*