

"ROOTED in Love: Part II"

NT: Luke 15:11-32  
Matthew 15:32-38

Peter: Today we are returning to what it means to be "ROOTED in Love." Last week we did part 1 and built the bottom layer for our sandwich cookie of love by beginning with the end in mind. We talked about God's love being a force to be reckoned with and that we are called and equipped to embody and express God's love to others throughout our lives. Our greatest purpose in life is to love (love God, love ourselves, and love others). With this end in mind our bottom layer is set. Today then we get to add the filling to our sandwich cookie. The precious middle, inside and heart. Today we are digging deeper into compassion. More specifically, we are talking about compassion as an act of love.

(9 am) To start I want to cover some basics. Then I would like to invite us to engage two very familiar stories in scripture that embody compassion; one read by Kathleen and the other by Erik. After the stories, I will unpack compassion more and then I would like to include Erik as we continue our conversation about compassion as it pertains to us. Sound like a plan?

First important point is to know that the word compassion in Greek is *splanchnizomai*. That is a fun word. Can you say it? *Splanchnizomai*. It is the idea of being moved in the inner parts of the body. Our ancient ancestors believed the inward parts of the body were the seat of emotions. We might refer mostly to the heart, but we also talk about having "visceral" feelings or feelings of the gut. True compassion affects us in the pit of our stomachs. "My gut tells me this is not a good idea." "I have a bad feeling about this." Those are negative but it also works positively. "My gut tells me today is going to be a good day." "I am ready. I have a really good feeling about this client or this presentation or this date." Our gut can tell us a lot. Second point is that *splanchnizomai* only occurs in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke). It specifically describes the compassion Jesus had for those he saw having trouble or experiencing difficulty. Other words used throughout scripture with similar meaning are acceptance, mercy, and pity.

(9 am) Now, let us recall two stories about Jesus' compassion toward others: **Luke 15:11-32** and **Matthew 15:32-38**.

(10:30) A moment ago we heard Kathleen read the parable of the prodigal son. We can also refer to that story as the parable of the compassionate father. And thank you again for the questions we were able to unpack a moment ago as well. Erik is going to read now another story about compassion. (Erik... A reading now from Matthew 15:32-38- Matthew's version of Jesus feeding the 5000... read text... The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.)

(Peter) So, the first story Kathleen read is about the compassion of a father who loves his son, regardless of his reckless life choices and irresponsible behavior. Now, I am sure it was not easy for the father to live day to day not knowing what his son was up to or having the belief that his son was betraying him and God by living aimlessly. For all the father knew, his son was lost and alone and dead. But **something** came over the father when he saw his son returning home. That something was- *splanchnizomai*- **compassion**.

I believe one of the main reasons Jesus shares this parable is to reveal the type of love and compassion God, our heavenly father, has for each of us when we turn towards home. We are to know that God's stomach churns for us when we are having trouble or experiencing difficulty in life. When we turn away from God, run away from home, are lost and alone, God cares about us so much and has such a desire to be in right relationship with us, God feels the very pain we do. And I believe God does this because it makes God's power and mercy more personal and real to us. God's compassion yields mercy. Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is the good news of the gospel: in our struggle, sin, and swarming hurt, God loves us, has compassion for us, and God's love and compassion provide for us God's free gifts of grace and mercy and wholeness.

The second story Erik read is more specifically about Jesus' example of compassion. The people gathering around were wandering aimlessly like lost sheep without a shepherd. As Jesus saw them, he felt for them and acted out of compassion to provide for them. And what he did out of that compassion was no small task. Jesus' compassion was deep enough and wide enough that he stepped into action, and asked the disciples to step into action, fulfilling the hunger and aimless wandering of a crowd of thousands. Even Jesus knew that to get people's attention you feed them first. But something Jesus knew better than anyone is how to get people to listen and follow him. Be compassionate. Compassion is power!!!

In addition to Jesus' sacrifice for us turning death into life, the next big reason God sent Jesus was to set an example for how to live faithfully in accordance to God's will. And since Jesus embodied compassion, we too are to have compassion.

Putting ourselves out there in a compassionate way may sometimes makes us uneasy and uncomfortable. If we admit it, we might even say we are a little scared and nervous being that vulnerable. Like the father and like Jesus, stepping into action with compassion requires some risk. But as I have mentioned before, with big risk comes big reward. When it comes to compassion the reward and fulfillment is a hundred-fold. The power and impact a single act of compassion can have is worth any measure of risk. No one knows that better than God and I do not think anyone celebrates that more than God.

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.” (Leo Buscaglia)

The Dalai Lama once said, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” What a message this is for us today amid all the unease and tension.

As members of God’s church, a part of the priesthood of all believers empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are all called to live into the ministries of compassion, witness, and service. Compassion is not reserved for a select few. Compassion calls to us all. This call flows out of our created nature and call to love. Compassion is the capacity to put love into action.

In her book “The Gifts of Imperfection”, Dr. Brene Brown talks a lot about compassion as taking the time, energy, and emotion to simply be with someone else in the moment, in their mess, in their pain. I talked about this several weeks ago while referencing our hands and so it was great when I came across the concept again. Dr. Brown writes, “it is as if we’ve divided the world into ‘those who offer help’ and ‘those who need help.’ The truth is that we are both.” We are all in need of support and we are all able to give support. “It (compassion) is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It is a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.”

Dr. Brown also says, “the heart of compassion is acceptance. The better we are at accepting ourselves and others, the more compassionate we become.” One of our greatest desires and needs in life as humans is to be accepted. To be accepted is to be enveloped by compassion. To be enveloped by compassion is to be loved.

There are two other words that come to mind when thinking about compassion: empathy and kindness. Our ability to feel empathy for others lays the foundation for being kind, charitable, and compassionate. Empathy is the power of gaining a glimpse into another person’s life and circumstance and, in that moment, open to a new understanding of them, of ourselves, and our interconnection. Just ask Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. And through small and large acts of kindness, we breathe life into the practice of compassion. Kindness is about expressing a deep understanding that we are all interchangeable, we are all connected.

Compassion is a real thing. And I think it is important when we are talking about real things in community and in life to hear real perspective. Just this week Erik and I had a conversation about compassion and through his perspective as a husband, father, businessman, and friend, I really appreciated where he was coming from. I asked him if he would be willing to share this morning and after much deliberation and arm twisting (just kidding) he agreed. Erik...

As Peter and I discussed text, and I spent time with it, I felt God taking me to the hillside. I felt like I was there.

Describe the scene briefly - the mood of sadness in Herod killing John the Baptist. Jesus is sad as his friend had died and he is heading across the lake to a desolate off to pray. The people are mourning, and in desperate need of a spiritual leader, so much so they walk miles around the lake to get to Jesus. He not only feeds them physically but feeds their souls with the comforting words of the God's kingdom and his love.

Feelings from the scene . . . Jesus's nourishment, feeling his love, compassion (being in it with us). This leads to a sense of calm, comfort in a difficult situation that cannot be fully described. I found myself looking at Jesus wondering how he was feeling. I looked up, saw a slight smile and water in his eyes. The power of Jesus to perform the miracle, yet the true essence of God's compassionate love on display. No doubt Jesus' heart was full, experiencing our pain, and the fulfillment he received from his compassionate act. I think the father in the prodigal son (God) felt the same way.

I then took a trip back to real life. I found myself thinking about how I can give back more and be more actively engaged in offering compassion to those in need. As I started thinking of opportunities, I felt myself being uneasy, a little uncomfortable. Examples include a close friends child is fighting terminal cancer, a partner at work had a terrible accident and may not walk again, a family member was fired from a 20 year career job that meant the world to them, bullies at school are picking on your 10 year old's best friend and your child is struggling. I found myself asking, what if I don't say the right thing, worse yet say the wrong thing and make the situation worse. This isn't my strength; others are better at this than me. If we are honest, don't we all to some degree, feel this way?

As I prayed, read scripture, and reflected, I realized we have all we need to offer compassion to others confidently. Think about it – the ultimate act of compassion (explain God's determination to bring us back into relationship, and he does, in and on the cross, Jesus' willingness to pay the price). 1 John 4 tells us if we believe in God he abides in us, verse 16: "So we have come to know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." We have the Holy Spirit living in us! Jesus tells the disciples on the night of his arrest they are better off with him leaving as I will ask the father to send the counselor, promised Holy Spirit. 1 Peter 1:3 Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy (compassion), he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." He is calling us to live our lives exemplifying Christlike character. He goes further in verse 21 telling us we have been born again, not of perishable, but imperishable seed. Friends, God has placed a piece of himself in us. His DNA! It is incumbent upon us to fertilize, water, nature the seed of love he has place in us (community, church, scripture, bible study etc.)

Story of own opportunities to show compassion to Andy- same water in the eyes.

Patch Adams- compassion is not just hard, it is joyful... red nose, bed pans for shoes and a hat...

Brothers and sisters, it is exciting! We have the privilege of being this generations foot soldiers - God's children he uses to share his love with the world. Let us put ourselves out there. It is not as hard as we think. As an extension of God, we are called into action, to be actively engaged in sharing compassion with others as often as we can. The Holy Spirit living in us will be our compass and guide, lead us to say and do the right things. The fulfillment we receive in return is a blessing from God.

Let All God's people say,  
Amen

