

Concern Vs Compassion! – Matthew Chapter 13: verses 31-33, 44-52: Synopsis of this week's sermon. Sunday 3rd August 2014

This week continues the summer programme of questions about our Christian faith with the question – Concern Vs Compassion? What's the difference and does it matter anyway?

If you 'Google' them this is what you get:

Concern: To trouble, worry or have disquiet about e.g. *I am concerned about his health.*

Compassion: A feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.

In his book 'A call to conversion' Jim Wallis says...

“ A very wise man told me the difference between concern and compassion.

Being concerned is seeing something awful happening to someone and feeling, hey that's really too bad.

Having compassion, he said, is seeing the same thing and saying I just can't let that happen to my brother.”

The difference is that compassion tends to grow out of a feeling of relationship – this is my brother, sister, part of God's family, a fellow human being, a child of God, and I must act, not just feel badly for them.

Did you know there are over 180,000 charities in Britain – and those are just the registered ones who have a turn over of £5,000 or more.

It highlights the vast number of people who need support in our communities – so many 'brothers' and 'sisters'. We can feel bombarded by charities requests on the TV and in the High Street by 'chuggers' or 'charity muggers' to the point that we can get charity fatigue. We can feel that they are playing on our guilt complex

But compassion is at the heart of the Christian gospel. If you look through the gospels you'll notice how often Jesus 'had compassion' on individuals or a crowd.

The bigger picture of Matthew's story today is Jesus having been in Nazareth. You might remember he couldn't show much miraculous compassion there in his hometown as they had little faith in him – there was no partnership in faith between him and them. So it's been a struggle, then he hears that his cousin John has been executed. He takes himself off to a deserted place to be by himself and spend time with his father. But a huge crowd follow him wanting to be inspired by hearing more of his teaching.

He has such a heart for them that he puts his plans for a bit of solitude aside. The disciples then suggest that they will all be getting hungry and need to go and buy some food. Jesus wants to meet their need and tells the disciples to provide for them rather than just send them away. This famous story has the disciples bringing him a child's food of five small loaves and two fish. His compassion explodes in generous giving and we have the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. (Bear in mind that the men ate separately and would have been the ones counted. In reality, with women and children it would easily have been anything between ten and fifteen thousand in total).

So why is this story so important to our faith and in our thinking about compassion?

1. Jesus was making a statement about who he was (God!) – there was a real echo of the manner God provided for the Israelites in Exodus and would not have been lost on the crowd.
2. It reminds us that God is compassionate – he sees needs and acts to alleviate them.
3. It shows us that what we give of ourselves to serve and honour Jesus, however insignificant it can seem, will be used with great effectiveness by God in our world.

The bigger story tells us that if we have faith in Jesus he can do amazing things in and through us for our neighbour. When we are open to God in prayer and sympathetic, caring and compassionate in the way we live our lives we can really help to transform and bring new life to our broken world.

Our prayers today:

Let us now bring our prayers to God, our heavenly Father who is always there for us, ready to listen.

We pray for our church here at the Annunciation. We think of our mission action plan and thank you for the ways in which we have been able to build up our common faith together over the last year. We thank you that from that shared faith we have been trying to reach out to our local community with your love and good news in practical ways. We ask your Spirit to be working in the lives of all those we have had the opportunity to meet, support and be welcoming to.

Lord we believe ... help our unbelief and in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray that as we consider our Action plan for the coming year over the next few months, that you would give us your heart, your mind, your love, your compassion, your willingness and energy to effectively share your good news.

And we pray specifically –

...that our faith would be inspired and emboldened;

we ask for prayerful hearts that grow in trust for your loving presence with us;

We pray that as we offer the little that we have with willing hearts, that you would take our 'loaves and fishes' and use them to bless many around us.... and that as a result we would see our fellowship here grow in strength, in faith and in number.

We pray, with faith often only the size of a tiny seed, that you would bless us with new families and individuals who can find the Annunciation a spiritual home.

Lord we believe ... help our unbelief and in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for all those who help lead our church – the PCC, the wardens and for Trevor. We ask for wisdom, unity in thought and vision from you to underpin all that we plan to do.

Lord we believe ... help our unbelief and in your mercy hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, who is there for us at all times and in all places, you are our loving and generous God.

We ask that you would accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.