

## **Showing Mercy and Gracefully Allowing Mercy to be Shown to Us**

14 July 2019

Reading: Luke 10:25-37

A small orphaned boy lived with his grandmother. One night their house caught fire. The grandmother was old and fragile. She perished in the flames trying to get to the boy. A crowd gathered around the burning house. The boy's cries for help could be heard above the crackling of the blaze. No one seemed to be willing to do anything as the house was a mass of flames.

Suddenly a stranger rushed from the crowd and circled to the back where he spotted an iron pipe that reached up to the upstairs window. He disappeared for a minute and then, to the cheers of the crowd, reappeared with the boy in his arms. He climbed down the pipe the boy hanging on around his neck.

Weeks later a public hearing was held in the town hall to determine in whose custody the boy should be placed. Each person wanting the boy was allowed to speak briefly. The first person got up, "I am a farmer. My farm is big, and a growing boy needs the outdoors to run and play in. I will take the boy." The second person was a teacher. "I have hundreds of books at home," she said. "If I have the boy, he will get a good education." Another spoke, "I am rich. If he comes with me, he will have wealth. I could buy him education, travel, and the outdoors."

The chair asked, "Is there anyone else?" From the back seat came a badly dressed tramp. He had slipped in unnoticed. He walked to the front and lines of suffering could be seen on his face. Standing at the front he slowly removed his hands from his pocket. A gasp went up. The little boy who eyes had been focused on the floor in shame looked up. The man's hands were covered in scars from burns. Suddenly the boy emitted a cry of recognition. Here was the one who had rescued him. His hands were scared from climbing up and down the hot pipe. With a leap the boy rushed up and hugged him tight. The farmer rose and left. The teacher left too. Even the rich man recognised he was defeated. Everyone left save the tramp and the boy. He had won him without a word spoken.

As we gather today there is another who has won us with scarred and wounded hands. We call him Jesus and he tells us a story today that calls us to compassion.

You know the story well: a man is beaten up, left half dead and then is rescued by a Samaritan.

By the time of Jesus, Jews and Samaritans had hated each other for a thousand years. When King Solomon died in 931 BC the united monarchy split into two factions. Jeroboam led a revolt of the ten northern tribes and established a new capital in Samaria. The two remaining tribes of the southern kingdom of Judah maintained a capital at Jerusalem. The legacy of this split was a millennium of political rivalry, ethnic hostility, and religious bigotry. Think the Irish troubles on steroids.

What moves the Samaritan is not Scriptures telling him what he should, but his God given heart. He is moved by pity, by compassion - we might call it love. Jesus even dares to call him good. The suggestion of a 'good' Samaritan would have so offended his audience.

Now at this point most preachers stop and tell us that we must go and help others. And of course, we should. But there is more to the story. There is another movement of grace.

I want to suggest another element of the story that could go unnoticed. The Jew has the grace to allow the Samaritan to minister to him.

It's not hard to imagine the story going very differently. The Jew could have said, "I don't want a filthy Samaritan helping and touching me. I'd rather die!"

So often in my work I meet people who, through pride or misplaced independence, do not allow others to show them compassion.

I was talking with a friend who was a missionary to the Caribbean. He felt strongly called to take the love of God to the people of the Caribbean. On these cold winter mornings, I can feel a strong call to a mission to the Caribbean too.

What he found most difficult about his 5 years in the Caribbean was not the work (he loved it) but the fact that he was totally dependent on another's generosity. One man supported his work. So, he went to him. "I feel bad," he said, "that you are giving me all this money." "Don't give it another thought," said the man, "I am very rich, and I don't have the courage to go the Caribbean as a missionary. You are going in my stead. That you allow me to support your work is a gift to me." After that my friend felt so much better. As Christians we are often programmed to think that we are the ones that must do all the helping. But all of us need the grace to allow others to minister to us.

It might be something small like a door opened or a cup of tea poured. It might be something big like a whole wage paid for you. It is just like we sing: "May I have the grace to let you be my servant too." And we all have different seasons in our life. At times we rely completely on the help of others, at other times we can be a help to others. Either way it is a transaction of grace.

For the transaction of compassion to be made there needs to be 'two to tango'. The giver (in this case a Samaritan) and a gracious receiver. The receiver allows himself to be anointed with healing oil. He lets himself be taken on the donkey. He allows his treatment to be paid for. And no doubt a greater miracle than a man rescued from the side of the road happened that day: two enemies become friends. If they had debated politics the two men would have remained enemies, but mercy and grace brought them together.

God given mercy causes us to reach out, God given grace allows us to be reached out too.

This day may I have a heart of compassion, but may I also have one of grace to allow others to minister to me.

Let us pray...

*With hands that are scarred by love's demands, you reach out to us Lord Jesus.  
Grant us your grace; grace to help others but also grace to allow them to help us.  
This we ask in your name.  
Amen*