

FACING CHALLENGES WITH COMPASSION AND WISDOM MAY 16 2010
ST. LUKE'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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Last Friday about 10,000 people from all over the nation and beyond came to the Conseco Field House to listen to the Dalai Lama speak about facing the challenges of life with compassion and wisdom.

Compassion is also a central theme in the teachings of Jesus. This past week I did some research on the Greek word for compassion and discovered that it is often used in the teachings of Jesus.

However, many translators translate the Greek word for compassion with the English words of either "mercy" or "pity."

For example, the fifth Beatitude of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is often translated as blessed are the merciful when it is equally accurate to translate it as blessed are the compassionate. I checked with Dr. Adolf Hansen, our resident Biblical scholar and former Greek Professor at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary and he agreed that compassion is an equally accurate translation of that Greek word and perhaps better conveys what Jesus was talking about.

Read Matthew 5:7. *Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

A similar thing is true in the story Jesus told of the beaten man on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho that is helped by a Good Samaritan. Here is how Luke tells the end of that story in Luke 10:33-37.

Read Luke 10:33-37. *But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'*

BUT A SAMARITAN WHILE TRAVELING CAME NEAR HIM AND WHEN HE SAW HIM HE WAS MOVED WITH COMPASSION. ...WHICH OF THESE THREE, DO YOU THINK, WAS A NEIGHBOR TO THE MAN WHO FELL INTO THE HANDS OF THE ROBBERS? HE SAID: THE ONE WHO SHOWED HIM COMPASSION. JESUS SAID TO HIM "GO AND DO LIKEWISE."

Let us pray.

Two weeks ago the group who went on a Holy Land pilgrimage, travelled the road between Jerusalem and Jericho which is a distance of about 17 miles. Jerusalem is on a high plateau and Jericho is below sea level so that road is a steep and winding road through barren hills. Even today, all you see along the road are Bedouin shepherds looking after their flocks among the steep and deserted hillsides.

The background on the sermon slide on the screen is an accurate visual picture of the hillsides that we drove through recently.

You all know the story of the Good Samaritan. A Jewish man is travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he is attacked by three or four bandits, stripped of his clothes and his possessions, beaten and left half dead and bleeding alongside the road.

Then a Priest and a Levite from the Temple in Jerusalem come along the road, see the beaten man, ignore his needs and continue on their journey to Jericho.

But a Samaritan, who was generally rejected and despised by the Jews of Jesus day, came along the road, stopped and saw the beaten Jewish man, felt compassion for him and bandaged his wounds, put him on his donkey and took him to a hotel in Jericho and paid for his room and board there.

Jesus then asked, "Who was the loving neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" The answer was "THE ONE WHO SHOWED HIM COMPASSION." Then Jesus replied to his disciples and to all of us, "GO AND DO LIKEWISE."

The point of this story is that Jesus commands us to show compassion to all people in need along the road of life regardless of their race, religion, nationality, gender, sexual orientation or any of the other artificial divisions we create among ourselves.

A Sunday School teacher once read this story to her Sunday School class and then asked the children: "IF YOU SAW A MAN BEATEN AND BLOODY AND HALF DEAD ALONG THE ROAD WHAT WOULD YOU DO?"

The class was quiet for a moment and then one little girl imagined herself seeing a man beaten and bloody and then raised her hand and honestly confessed: "I WOULD PROBABLY THROW UP!"

At least that little girl would not ignore him like the Priest and Levite did and she did have some compassion for him that might cause her a physical reaction!

This is a story in which Jesus makes it absolutely clear that his followers are to do acts of compassion for the people in need around us. The man who showed compassion to a person in need is honored and we are commanded to do the same thing in our time.

Jesus made a similar plea for his followers to practice compassion in the fifth beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount.

It is usually translated BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL FOR THEY SHALL RECEIVE MERCY. However, the word mercy sometimes gives the impression of a superior person who can give someone beneath them judgment or mercy.

Compassion is defined in the dictionary as "to feel with" or "to suffer with someone else" or to have sympathy or empathy for another person. A compassionate person is one who feels the other person's pain and experiences their suffering with them.

Therefore, I think a more helpful translation would be BLESSED ARE THE COMPASSIONATE FOR THEY SHALL RECEIVE OR EXPERIENCE COMPASSION FROM GOD.

The point Jesus makes is very simple: If we want God to be compassionate, forgiving and understanding to us, then we must also be compassionate, forgiving and understanding towards others.

BLESSED ARE WE WHEN WE ARE COMPASSIONATE FOR THEN WE WILL EXPERIENCE COMPASSION SHOWN TO US AS WELL.

This means that the way we treat other people will be the way we will be treated as well. If we are judgmental and condemning toward others, then we will experience judgment and condemnation from God. If we are compassionate and forgiving towards others, then we will experience compassion and forgiveness from God.

It is clear that the followers of Jesus are called to express compassion towards all persons in need around us.

Now in a similar way, the Dalai Lama, the religious leader of Tibetan Buddhism, reminds us to live with compassion towards all creatures.

At the Dalai Lama's talk at Conseco Field House last Friday, I welcomed people to the program and spoke on behalf of the INDIANAPOLIS INTERFAITH HUNGER INITIATIVE a coalition of Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh leaders who are committed to making Indianapolis hunger-free as far as children are concerned and to make one county in Kenya hunger-free for children over the next few years.

After he was introduced by Elaine and John Mellencamp, the Dalai Lama spoke for several minutes about the importance of expressing our compassion by feeding the hungry around us. He made it clear that feeding hungry people is the basic way of expressing compassion to people here at home and around the world.

Following his speech we had about 5,000 people or 50% of the people present stop by our table and pick up information about participating in the Interfaith Hunger Initiative. The Interfaith Hunger Initiative will receive about \$60,000 from the net proceeds to feed hungry people in Indianapolis and in Kenya.

Then the Dalai Lama explained why we should be compassionate to each other when he said, "WE ARE ALL THE SAME."

He referred to the fact that we were from different religious traditions and different nations but at the human level we are all the same. As human beings we all need food, clothing, shelter, rest, love and supportive relationships. As human beings from around the world our children need to know love and affection if they are to grow and develop as loving human beings. At the basic human level, we are all the same.

In his recent book, *THE ART OF HAPPINESS IN A TROUBLED WORLD*, the Dalai Lama amplifies this idea by saying that when we look at each other, we often focus on the differences among us. We are male or female; we are younger or older, we are married or single, we are tall or short; we are bald or have hair; we are black or white or brown or yellow, we speak different languages as our native language; we are from different nations, we have different religious traditions and beliefs and on and on.

When we see someone, the first things we often notice are the differences among us.

However, he said our world would change if, when we met someone new and different from us, all we saw was our similarities. All we saw was that we are common human beings with similar hopes and dreams for our lives and the lives of those we love.

What a difference it would make if the first thought we had when we saw someone else was WE ARE ALL THE SAME rather than focusing on the differences among us.

If we saw ourselves as fundamentally the same, then what hurts you hurts me; what brings you joy brings me joy; we would see ourselves as part of the same human family regardless of the surface differences among us.

Therefore since we are fundamentally all the same, we should treat every person we meet with compassion because we are basically related to each other as a part of the same human family.

One of the Dalai Lama's most concise ways of putting this is to say:

IF YOU WANT OTHERS TO BE HAPPY, PRACTICE COMPASSION.
IF YOU WANT TO BE HAPPY, PRACTICE COMPASSION.

Think about that. One of the deepest desires of all human beings is to be happy, or to be joyful - to find meaning and fulfillment in our lives and in our relationships.

We often think that we will be happy if we have a lot of money, power, fame, or prestige but the unhappiness of so many Americans who have all those things proves that those things don't bring happiness.

Happiness or joy comes to someone else when we are compassionate towards them. You know the joy you feel when someone expresses compassion for you. But it is also true that happiness comes to us only when we are compassionate to others.

BLESSED ARE THE COMPASSIONATE FOR THEY WILL EXPERIENCE COMPASSION AS WELL.

The Dalai Lama said that when we show compassion to others, it makes for happy families, happy communities and a happy world. Compassion is the key to peace in the world.

After his talk, he invited questions from the audience.

One young woman named Erin took the microphone and asked the Dalai Lama how to be compassionate towards someone you are very angry with. She went on to say that she was filled with anger towards her ex-husband.

The Dalai Lama who is also well trained in psychology played the role of counselor to her in the midst of all these people. He explained that while we can't control all of the outward negative circumstances which happen to us, we can control our own mental attitude towards those outward circumstances. He recommended that she not allow her anger to consume her thoughts, not worry about it so much and learn to let it go.

Then the Dalai Lama identified with her pain by saying: "I lost my whole country. There is no use to worry so much." But now that he lost his country, he said he has discovered freedom to travel around the world and to speak to a broader audience about living life with compassion and peace. When she lets go of her anger she will discover new freedom as well.

The Dalai Lama's reference to losing his whole country reminded me of the tragic history of the Buddhists of Tibet over the past 50 years.

The Dalai Lama was both the spiritual and political leader of the Tibetan people until 1959 when the Communist Chinese government invaded Tibet and the Dalai Lama and hundreds of Buddhists had to flee to India where they still live as a government and people in exile. Over the course of the past 50 years, the Dalai Lama has had to watch as the Chinese government destroyed dozens of Buddhist monasteries, killed or imprisoned hundreds of Buddhist monks, and sent thousands of Chinese to live in Tibet to try to destroy the Tibetan Buddhist culture.

Now if anyone would have a reason to be resentful or filled with anger for what has happened to him and to his people it would be the Dalai Lama. Yet in the midst of all this suffering and oppression of his people for the past 50 years he has remained filled with compassion for all including the Chinese people and a tireless worker for non-violence and peace and lives with the hope of one day living again in Tibet in peace with the Chinese government.

In 1989, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violence work for peace in the world.

As I listened to the Dalai Lama talk about compassion and peace with all people including those who oppress you or those who have hurt you, I was reminded of the teachings of Jesus who once said, "LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE AGAINST YOU."

As a follower of Jesus I find this very hard to practice, to love our enemies and pray for those who may hurt us. But the Dalai Lama is a model of this teaching of Jesus in an amazing way and simply radiates peace, acceptance and compassion to everyone who meets him.

Being with the Dalai Lama this past week simply made me want to become a more devoted follower of Jesus and actually practice the teachings of Jesus in my life more consistently.

At the end of his speech the Dalai Lama called me up on the stage and gave me this white scarf which is a sign of compassion and friendship.

Then I was invited to go on the motorcade to take him to the airport where Jim and Meg Irsay had donated the Colts private jet to fly him to his next appointment in Minnesota. At the airport I had an opportunity to speak to him personally as he departed and I thanked him for bringing a message of compassion and peace especially in the light of the suffering that he and his people have faced in this world.

As I was pondering the Dalai Lama's talk on compassion and wisdom it occurred to me that compassion is the doorway into the house of wisdom.

If we want to become wise in this world then we start by being compassionate towards others.

Jesus expressed God's love and compassion for all people and compassion for all led him to the wisdom of God.

If we want to be wise in this world, it seems to me that we start by being compassionate and a compassionate life leads us to become wise leaders.

Abraham Lincoln is seen as one of the wisest leaders our world has produced. And Abraham Lincoln was also known for his compassion as one who visited the wounded confederate soldiers who were hospitalized in Washington DC during the Civil War.

Mother Teresa is seen as one of the wise leaders in our world and she was exceedingly compassionate to the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, India.

The Dalai Lama is seen as one of the wise leaders of our world and has received the Nobel Peace Prize for his wisdom and peacemaking activities. And the Dalai Lama is one of the most compassionate persons you will ever meet.

At the event last Friday, I met a physician from another community who was a volunteer to do whatever he could to help facilitate the Dalai Lama's visit.

I asked him how he came to become involved with the Buddhists here in Indiana. This medical doctor explained that he had never been interested in religion before. He never attended church or participated in any spiritual activities; he was simply too busy in his practice of medicine for religion.

However, when the Dalai Lama came to Purdue University three years ago, he went to the event simply out of curiosity. He said that when the Dalai Lama came into the room he was just a few rows from the front and he felt overwhelmed with the feeling of loving energy which radiated to him from the Dalai Lama.

He said that he had always heard about the love of God but he never really felt it in his life until that moment. As the Dalai Lama spoke about love and compassion this doctor said he felt the love of God pouring into his own life.

From that moment on, he started his spiritual journey. He said he started attending the United Methodist Church in his town; he started attending Buddhist meditation services and for the first time in his life he experienced the love and peace of God surrounding him.

As he talked about this experience, he almost got tears in his eyes because was such a powerful feeling of the presence of God.

This man's life was changed because he felt the love and compassion of God come to him through this Buddhist monk and he now attends a United Methodist Church. Go figure!

The question that came to me was this. Do the people around us experience the love and compassion of God coming through us into their lives? Do we model the love and compassion of God for others? When your friends or relatives think about you do they describe you as a person of compassion and love?

Jesus teaches us that God loves each of us unconditionally.

Now the only question is: does that love and compassion flow so strongly into us that those around us feel it and are drawn to God because of it.

My image is that God's love flows into our lives and fills us full to overflowing and others experience the love of God through the overflow.

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.

If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

Our final Hymn is *LOVE DIVINE, ALL LOVES EXCELLING* and it has this line at the end of the first verse:

JESUS THOU ART ALL COMPASSION, PURE, UNBOUNDED LOVE THOU ART;
VISIT US WITH THY SAALVATION, ENTER EVERY TREMBLING HEART.

Today may the all compassionate love of Jesus enter into every one of our trembling hearts.

Let us pray.