

Compassion is Our Plumb Line

Amos 7: 7-17; Luke 10: 25-37

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says something odd. He says that all things are lawful. Through Christ, we have been forgiven of all things and we are free; we no longer have the “shoulds” and the “rights and wrongs” of the old faith or other icons or idols. But rather, we have an active and living faith because we have an active and living God.

But of course, he is Paul, so he also notes: not all things are beneficial, constructive, leading to the health of the community and of one’s faith. He describes why we are called to decide with the Holy Spirit in mind and our community in mind. As Jesus would say, love your neighbour as yourself, love God with everything you are, and Jesus says this knowing that there will be times when you need to decide, not only between the best, most beneficial (and the worst) but at times between two goods options; two things may be abundantly understood as beneficial. We are called to be ready to love and serve our neighbours, be ready to recognize that everyone is a neighbour, be able and ready to recognize that we are at times called to be the good Samaritan! Add to this that we are also worthy of the care that the beaten down, the robbed and stripped and the left behind. Whenever we feel like and are that person, we deserve the care and love of a Samaritan.

Being ready to love our neighbour as ourselves, which means being ready to love ourselves, is hard work. Last week Karen introduced us to six marks of discipleship, taught to us in the Bible and summarized well by Michael Foss in his book, *Power Surge*. The first three are the things we are called to do on a regular basis so that we are prepared to make the kinds of decisions Paul and Jesus are calling us to make: daily prayer, weekly worship and bible reading. We need to be doing these practices so we can hear clearly for when we are called upon for help or for decision making.

Daily Prayer

I have a question for you. When was the last time you had a decision to make and before making it, before even making the pros and cons list you might have been taught to make in school, you placed the decision before God? Not to receive an answer, but to openly and honestly place it before God. To place, as on a banquet table, the options, the emotions that come with each option and the emotions that come with having to make the choice. It would be a banquet table

of who you are in this moment and you would be placing it before God - not necessarily for answers, but rather to remember that everything on that table is acceptable to God. To remember that nothing on that table is unlawful or bad. To remember that God accepts all of who is shown on the table (who you are). To remember that God is ready to both listen to you and give you the opportunity to listen to God.

Weekly Worship

For some people, the wisdom of God comes during those quieter moments of prayer. For myself though, as an extrovert, I usually need to go to the second mark of discipleship to begin to make my decision: weekly worship. I need to be reminded that I am not alone no matter what decision I make. I need to sit with my mentors and spiritual elders. They are great because they not only give me wisdom about the decision itself but they also remind me of a great question:

Will this matter in five days? Will this matter in five weeks? Five years from now will you be glad you spent this much time worrying about this. Now sometimes the answer is yes. But often I find myself ruminating about a decision that in five years I am going to literally paint over.

No matter what choice I make of paint colour it will change! Some decisions need grace; a reminder of the bigger world and that is another place where our third mark comes in.

Reading the Bible

We are called to begin practising reading the Bible before we have a big decision to make.

Now...I know what you've heard. You've heard you ask the question, "God what colour should I paint my bedroom?" And you take the Bible and you say God please answer. (At this point Leigh closed the pulpit bible and reopened it at a random place.) Alright! Here is the answer: "on the third day she entered her prayer she took off her garments in which she worshipped, and she arrayed herself in splendid attire (oh wait!) all covered with gold and precious stone." See, the answer is right there! (*sarcasm*)

Thank you to Esther! As a regular Bible reader though... I am aware that Esther is quite different from me. She lived in a completely different time, probably couldn't read, was an orphan raised by her uncle and was part of a harem of a king. Sorry to disappoint you, but I am none of those things. I really am not. I also don't have precious stones or gold paint.

We need to know our Bible well enough to know that the colour paint choice is not going to be in here. Also, if I have done my Bible reading regularly, might know things about how God wants me to consider all of creation (which might mean I pick a paint brand based on ecological values) and remember that spending hundreds of dollars on a new paint for my bedroom might not be how Jesus would ask me to spend that money. I might hear from the Bible the wisdom of do it as cheaply as possible and give the rest of the money to someone who doesn't even have a

bedroom to paint. The regularity of going to the Bible means it is not a stranger when we open it up.

These regular prayers and worship and study help us to be ready for those moments of decision making, but it doesn't make it easy still. The lawyer and the Levite that walked past that bruised and broken man in our story followed the law. It was unlawful to touch a body that might be dead. It was unlawful to touch blood. In their profession circles, they would have lost credibility or even their jobs. And yet they are not who Jesus proclaims the "good neighbour" in the story!

Serve and Give

The good neighbour in the story is someone who goes out of his way. We don't know what his plans were, but we know he was on a journey to a destination. He took time away from that trip to ensure the safety of a broken one. He gave money; perhaps money he was going to use to paint his bedroom, I am not sure, but he gave it to a stranger; he trusted that stranger's good intentions to follow the laws of hospitality and take care of his guest. These two things, this *servicing* the other and *giving* of his gifts are the two next marks of discipleship.

Spiritual Friendship

I believe that between the innkeeper, the Samaritan and the broken one began the work of the sixth mark which is creating and cultivating spiritual friendships, friendships of trust and accountability. I don't know what happened when the Samaritan went back to cover any debt. I know if I was the broken one being healed, I would be forever in *his* debt and want to know who he was, what brought him to that moment. If I was the innkeeper, I would want to stay in contact with this kind of person. The kind of person who uses my business not for their own gain but for the gain of the broken.

Michael Foss says that when we use these six marks of discipleship and when we go to make decisions we will ask ourselves: will this enable my community, family, self and neighbour to activate a mature faith? Will this expand love, expand me? And that, my friends, is one of the definitions of compassion.

Compassion is not helping someone because I have got extra money in the bank and it is not helping someone because it fits into my schedule. It is not seeking to feel empathy with someone to get points with someone else.

Compassion is when we break open ourselves. We risk spending too much time, energy, empathy to see what God will do. I pray that this week God shows you the wisdom of compassion in your life and gives you an opportunity to share it. Amen.