

January 15, 2015

Authentic Christianity
How Compassionate are You?
Luke 8:40-48

Opening words: Authenticity is a big deal. Webster defines authentic as: genuine or real; not false or copied. The issue of being authentic is important. Our world will tolerate many things, but our world will not tolerate a fraud. It is true in the secular world and it is true in the church. It is not enough to know the words of the creeds; we must live a life worthy of Jesus. In the life of the church, there is no room for hypocrites. We must be authentic Christians.

Today, I continue my sermon series, *Authentic Christianity*. True Christianity is life-altering. It should be affecting your behavior and opinions. Each week we will look at a different Christian characteristic that should be present in your life. Today's message is on compassion. The question you must answer is, *how compassionate are you?* Our scripture reading for today is Luke 8:40-48.

Luke 8:40-48 Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him.⁴¹ Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house⁴² because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him.⁴³ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years but no one could heal her.⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you."⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."⁴⁷ Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.⁴⁸ Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

Albert Schweitzer once said, "*The purpose of human life is to serve, and to show compassion and the will to help others.*" If that quote makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

In 1942, Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Soon, Jews were rounded up and sent to concentration camps. One of those Jews was Wladyslaw Szilman. Prior to the war, he was known as a refined concert pianist. However, to Nazi Germany, he was just another Jew. He was sent to Treblinka. He survived via a series of lucky incidents and was somehow left behind in Warsaw, where he spent the the balance of the war. In 1944, he was discovered by a German officer by the name of Captain Wilm Hosenfeld. Instead of turning in Szilman, he had compassion on him. He brought him food and offered him

safety. Their story was turned into a 2002 Academy Award winning film, *The Pianist*. The movie reminds us to never underestimate the power of compassion. If you can agree with that statement, say, "**Amen!**" Can I confess something to you?

I learned something new this week! I used to think empathy and compassion were interchangeable words. I was wrong (I hope you are not too shocked!). I learned they are two completely different words with two completely different meanings. They are a million miles apart. Webster defines **compassion** as, *sympathetic pity and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering*. Webster defines **empathy** as, *the ability to understand and share the feelings of another*. To be more clear, compassion helps to eliminate someone's suffering. Empathy just feels bad about someone's suffering. For years, I have considered myself a compassionate person. Now I have my doubts. Maybe I was just an empathetic person? That insight has changed the way I look at myself. How many examples do you need?

Cognitive

For years, I have watched the news and have felt bad for the people of North Korea. It is literally the darkest place in the world. Ruled by a narrow-minded dictator with a bad haircut, the North Korean people are suffering. Food shortages and famine are common. Torture, executions and labor camps are common. The standard of living is deplorable. I read everything I could about North Korea because I felt bad for her citizens. The people of North Korea do not stand alone. The same can be said of the people of China. The same can be said for the starving people in Africa. The same can be said for the Syrian refugees. The same can be said of Haiti and the rest of the Third World. Feeling bad for someone doesn't make you compassionate. Feeling bad for someone only makes you empathetic. Compassionate people do all in their power to eliminate someone else's suffering. I have done nothing for those people. Listen to the next line. Jesus expects us to be compassionate. He expects us to do something to eliminate human suffering. If you understand that concept, say, "**Amen!**"

Emotional

The other night on the NBC evening news, they reported on a children's hospital. Perhaps you saw the report. Children who are facing surgery are encouraged to bring their favorite stuffed animal into the hospital with them. The surgical team would pretend to do the same surgery on the stuffed animal that they did on the child. They hope that act of kindness brings the child some comfort. They focused on a little boy, maybe three or four years old, who needed a heart transplant. The animal had the same incision as the boy. The last few seconds of the report showed the little boy lying in bed with his stuffed animal. The youngster had his shirt off and they showed his incision. It covered his entire chest, from his throat to his belly button. I will be honest with you. When I saw that picture of that little boy, I began to swell with emotion. I couldn't look, but I could pray. If you had asked me on that evening if I was a compassionate person, I would have said, "Yes!" But, I would have been wrong.

I was only empathetic. Compassion requires action. I could do nothing for the little boy. Jesus expects us to be compassionate. Jesus expects us to do something.

The most difficult thing for me to watch on television are those commercials from the ASPCA. They grab my heart from the very beginning. There is some poor dog locked in a cage. Lacking water and food, he looks sickly and thin. Usually, they are maimed in some way. The dog is always well behaved and still. Without saying a word, his eyes cry out for help. I usually don't make it through an entire commercial without changing the station. I pet my dog, Macy, the world's best dog, and say, "You've got the life!" Surely, I am a compassionate person. No, I am only an empathetic person. I have never agreed to send the 60 cents a day to improve a dog's life. On the day you agreed to send the 60 cents a day to improve a dog's life, you graduated from being an empathetic person to a compassionate person. Empathy only feels. Compassion acts. Having said all of this, let us look at this morning's scripture lesson.

Active

We find ourselves today in the eighth chapter of Luke. Jesus is in Galilee, which means his popularity is very high. The crowd is large and demanding. Everyone seems to have someone in their lives who needs to be healed. Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, is one of those. He throws himself at the feet of Jesus and begs the Master to come to his house. His twelve-year-old daughter is dying. Jesus had compassion on this desperate father and turns to leave with him. There is no time to waste. It is at this point, our story really begins. A woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years approaches the Master from behind. She touches his robe and is instantly healed. Jesus feels the healing power leave him and stops to find out who touched him. To the ears of Peter, it is a ridiculous question. Many people had been pressing up against Jesus. So, Jesus clarifies the question. Verse 46 says, "*Someone touched me; I know the power has gone out of me.*" Guilty, the woman confesses and expects the worst. Jesus saw her groveling on the ground as he heard her story. The woman who had already suffered much in life expected to be reprimanded. She was wrong. Jesus didn't reprimand her. Instead, he had compassion on her and sent her on her way with a blessing. Jesus has such compassion on this woman that he calls her "Daughter". That is a term of belonging or acceptance. You can't read this story and question Jesus's compassion. Never underestimate compassion! That is not the only Bible story where Jesus's compassion is revealed.

Do you remember when Jesus went to the town of Nain? (Luke 7:11-17) The first thing he encountered was a funeral. The deceased was a young man. The editor goes out of the the way to tell us, he was the only son of a widow. The woman is completely shattered by the event. If I were God, parents would never bury their children. Yet, she is not just a grieving mother. She is grieving widow. That means she has nothing and she should expect nothing. Jesus sees the poor woman and, according to verse 13, his heart went out to her. In other words, he had compassion on her. By the end of the story, Jesus resurrected her dead son and the story of this great miracle was shared by

everyone. You can't read this story and question Jesus's compassion. Never underestimate compassion!

There was the time that Jesus came down from the mountain. He was greeted by a great crowd. One in the crowd was a man with leprosy (Matthew 8:1-4). Leprosy is a highly contagious skin disease. In our time, leprosy is treatable, but not so in Jesus's time. The leper's future held only loneliness and other disfigured lepers. This man is desperate. He breaks the rules of isolation and throws himself at the feet of Jesus. Jesus has compassion on him and does the unthinkable. He touches him. The man is instantly healed. You can't read this story and question Jesus's compassion. Never underestimate compassion! It is not enough to be empathetic; feeling but not acting. You must be compassionate and respond to the suffering. To make this point, let me tell you one more Bible story.

In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, Jesus tells a story about the sheep and the goats to teach about the Kingdom of God. You remember the story: The sheep get into heaven because they respond to human suffering. The goats are barred from heaven because they ignore the suffering. In others words, they literally go to hell. Do you remember the words?

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

Never underestimate compassion! Jesus expects you to be compassionate, not just empathetic. Let me ask you the question of the morning again. How compassionate are you? If that me you think, say, **“Amen!”**

There is an old Irish legend about a king who had no children. That meant he had no heir. To deal with the problem, the king devised a plan. His sent messengers out to tell all the young men of the kingdom to apply for the job. There were only two requirements. First, they must love God. Second, they must love fellow human beings. A young man in a particularly dark section of the kingdom wanted to apply, but he didn't have the appropriate clothes to wear to the king's court. He accepted extra work to buy the appropriate wardrobe and in time raised the needed funds. The next day he put his new clothes on and headed to the castle. As he neared the castle, he was confronted by a homeless man. The beggar extended his arms and held out his hands

for help. He said, "I am hungry, thirsty and cold. Can you help me?" The young man was so moved that he gave him his food. He gave him his water and he took off his fine new clothes to warm him. The young man was back to where he started. Broken-hearted, he decided he had nothing to lose, so he went to the castle. When his appointment came, he was shocked to see the king. It was the homeless man, who was still wearing his clothes. The young man questioned the king, "Why did you trick me?" The king responded, "To discover if you truly were a compassionate man of God. You are my successor! You will inherit my kingdom." It isn't just true in the fable. It is also true in the Kingdom of God. It isn't enough to be empathetic. You must be compassionate. You must do something to eliminate human suffering. Let me ask you the question of the morning again. How compassionate are you?

Do you remember the words of Albert Schweitzer? He once said, "*The purpose of human life is to serve, and to show compassion and the will to help others.*" If that quote makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"