

March 29, 2020

Give Up!  
Give Up Indifference!  
Mark 1:29-34

**Opening words:** How many times have you been asked the question, "What are you giving up for Lent?" It's a good question. Many in our area do give up something for Lent because it is a Roman Catholic tradition. The idea of giving up something for Lent is based on Matthew 16:24, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." So, giving up something for Lent is about self-denial. It's not a second chance at your broken New Year's resolution. Giving up something for Lent is not a bad thing but a good thing. Giving up something for Lent should be done prayerfully, so we can wholly renew ourselves in Christ. There are certain things that are holding us back spiritually.

This is sermon number six in this year's Lenten sermon series, *Give Up!* We are looking at things that are impeding our spiritual growth. To date, we have looked at arrogance, control, darkness and enemies. Next week, on Palm Sunday, we will look at popularity. On Easter, we will look at death, itself. Today, we look at indifference. Our Gospel reading for today is Mark 1:29-34. Let me call this message *Give Up Indifference!*

**Mark 1:29-34** As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. <sup>30</sup> Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. <sup>31</sup> So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them. <sup>32</sup> That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed. <sup>33</sup> The whole town gathered at the door, <sup>34</sup> and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910) was a Scottish Baptist minister, once said, "Kindness and compassion make a person attractive." That leads us to an interesting question. How attractive are you? If that question makes you think say, "**Amen!**"

Perhaps the greatest name in American history is Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865). Everyone knows his story. Self-educated, he became a lawyer in Illinois and in time became our sixteenth president in 1860. His election was not embraced by all. Before he could be sworn into office, the country was divided over the issue of state's rights. (We still struggle with state's rights.) Lincoln sat in the oval office during the bloody years of the Civil War, tested time and time again.

History tells us Abraham Lincoln often visited military hospitals during the Civil War to cheer up the wounded. On one occasion, he saw a young soldier who was near death.

Lincoln's heart was broken. "Is there anything I can do for you," asked the compassionate President. "Please write a letter to my mother," the young soldier replied. Unrecognized by the soldier, Lincoln sat down and wrote as the youth told him what to say. The letter read,

**My Dearest Mother,**

**I was badly hurt while doing my duty, and I won't recover. Don't sorrow too much for me. May God bless you and Father. Kiss Mary and John for me.**

The young man was too weak to go on, so Lincoln signed the letter for him and then added this postscript,

**Written for your son by Abraham Lincoln.**

Asking to see the note, the soldier was astonished to discover who had shown him such kindness. "Are you really our President," he asked. "Yes," was the quiet answer. We can admire Lincoln for many reasons. One of the reasons was his compassion. Do the people in your life consider you compassionate? Maybe this is a better question: Has there been a time your life when you needed some compassion? I wrote this message in the middle of the great pandemic cause by the coronavirus. Now is a time when compassion is needed. Webster defines compassion as, "*A sympathy for the feeling of others, often including a desire to help.*" Compassion has always been important because our world can be a hard place. You know it is true. You don't have to be a soldier in a civil war to relate to that story. I have never met a person who never needed compassion occasionally.

Have you ever felt victimized? You did absolutely nothing wrong and you tried your very best. The problem is everything went wrong. Your entire world attacked you and you found yourself filled with self-pity. In a world filled with seven and a half billion people, you felt completely alone. Then, from a most unexpected source, God sent you someone who showed you kindness and compassion. The rest of the world questioned your motives and desires, but your angel only gave you peace. Compassion can be a powerful medicine. The scripture lesson for today is filled with compassion. If you are ready to begin, say, "**Amen!**"

Let me let you in on a little secret. It has become my custom to take a nap on Sunday afternoons. I have no proof to support the following statement, but I believe it is true. I expend more energy on Sunday morning than the rest of the week combined. I get up early on Sunday mornings to review my material and update my prayers. I participate in three worship services, which means I preach three times. I relate to countless people and try to remember everyone's story. I try to welcome everyone who enters our building. There is a certain amount of stress to my job. I try to be prophetic; I am

speaking for God, yet I can't insult anyone. Some have real thin skin. I know it doesn't sound like much, but I find these few hours to be exhausting. When I leave the church after Sunday morning I am spent. I struggle with the simplest conversations because I can't focus. I eat a lunch out, enjoy my wife's company, turn off my cell phone and take a nap on the sofa. It is the deepest sleep I have all week. This fact is not exciting, but it is true.

According to the text today, Jesus was a better man than I. When Jesus left worship, he didn't nap; he healed the sick. I don't just mean a healing I mean a multitude of healings. Verses thirty-three and thirty-four say, *"The whole town (of Capernaum) gathered at the door (of Simon and Andrew's house), and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was."* One of those healings, the first one mentioned, was the mother-in-law of Simon Peter. Verse thirty is key to our understanding of this morning's message. It says she was healed because they told Jesus about her. I am not exactly sure who is included in the word "they", but "they" must have included Simon Peter. She may not have been healed if "they" had not told Jesus about her. "They" had compassion on her and got her some help. They got her the best help you can possibly get someone in need, Jesus. She benefited from their compassion. Do the people in your life consider you a compassionate person?

Today, I want to cultivate your compassionate side. I want to do this by giving three pieces of pastoral advice that you should never forget. Our world needs more compassionate people because our world has a surplus of struggling people. You can find the struggling everywhere. You can find them in your neighborhood. You can find them at work. You can find them at school. You can find them at church. We are not excluded. Our world is filled with suffering, broken people who need compassion. So, if you are ready to develop your compassionate side, say, **"Amen!"**

### **Compassion is sensitive to the needs of others.**

First, never forget, compassion is sensitive to the needs of others. British statesman and financier Cecil Rhodes (1853-1902), whose fortune was used to endow the world-famous Rhodes Scholarships, was a stickler for correct dress—but apparently not at the expense of someone else's feelings. A young man was invited to dine with Rhodes. He arrived by train and had to go directly to Rhodes's home in his travel-stained clothes. Once there, he was appalled to find the other guests already assembled, wearing full evening dress. After what seemed a long time Rhodes appeared, in a shabby old blue suit. Later the young man learned that his host had been dressed in evening clothes too, but he put on the old suit when he heard of his young guest's dilemma.

Simon's mother-law was in bed with a fever. The story doesn't come with a medical chart and a graph with all her test scores. The truth is, we don't know the source of her suffering. That is not important; all that is important is that others had compassion on her. They got her help. Does anyone in your life need help? Do you have anyone in

your life that needs Jesus? If you do, say, "Amen!" Compassion is sensitive to the needs of others.

### **Compassion takes advantage of interruptions.**

Second, never forget, compassion takes advantage of interruptions. Have you ever noticed there are times when your agenda and God's agenda don't match? You know the scene. You have a million things to do. You have a deadline to meet or a sea of people waiting for you. You are in a hurry trying to get it done in time and suddenly, someone shows up who just talked to you. They have a problem and you are the only one that can help. I know it is hard, but remember, compassion takes advantage of interruptions.

Consider these ten Bible stories with me:

1. The Parable of the Good Samaritan
2. The Greatest Commandment
3. The Blessing of the Little Children
4. The Healing of the Ten Lepers
5. The Healing of the Paralytic
6. The Healing of the Man Blind from Birth
7. The Rich Young Ruler
8. Zacchaeus
9. Blind Bartimaeus
10. Nicodemus

What do they all have in common? They are all special moments in the Bible that were produced by interruptions. Jesus had compassion on these people and used these interruptions to do real ministry. Have you ever noticed there are times when your agenda and God's agenda don't match? The healing of Simon's mother-in-law was not on the agenda for the day, but Jesus healed her because this was an opportunity for true ministry. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Compassion is sensitive. Compassion takes advantage of interruptions.

### **Compassion is gracious.**

Third and final, never forget, compassion is gracious. When I was in the Cleveland area, I had a parishioner who claimed he hadn't missed church for fifty years. One day, I figured out he had heard 2600 sermons, plus the messages on the liturgical holidays. You do the math, fifty years times fifty-two weeks. I was impressed.

One year I got involved in the annual pulpit exchange. You know the event. It is a way to get to know other preachers in the area. I went to the Presbyterian Church, and the Lutheran Church minister came to my church. The Lutheran preacher was just great! He was new to the area and everyone was surprised to discover he was Korean. Mr. 2600 sermons saw the Lutheran minister and thought he was Japanese. He stood up from his pew and began yelling some ugly language. He said, "We fought them in the

war. I don't have to listen to them in my church." He stormed out of the church, never to be seen again. Everyone wanted to know what happened. I wanted to know if he had heard a single word of those 2600 sermons. There is no room for prejudiced behavior in God's church, because compassion is gracious.

I really don't want to offend anyone, but I must ask, how much of a difference is Jesus making in your life? How many sermons have you heard in your life? How many of those sermons altered your life? The world doesn't really care about your opinions. The world needs your compassion. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Compassion is sensitive. Compassion takes advantage of interruptions. Compassion is gracious.

Let us end at the side of our dying Civil War soldier. You remember the soldier. He was wounded and Abraham Lincoln came to visit him. In time, the president wrote a letter home for him and said his good-bye's. The soldier couldn't believe the president's kindness and compassion. But he really couldn't believe it when the president said next, "Now, is there anything else I can do?" The lad feebly replied, "Will you please hold my hand? I think it would help me see this through to the end." With the weight of the world on his shoulders, Lincoln held the young man's hand until he died.

How many hands have you held during life's most difficult moments? The situation may not be death, it may be divorce. The situation maybe a family problem, it may be a personal pain. It may be disease; it may be disappointment. How many hands have you held? How many people in your life need compassion? Alexander Maclaren once said, "Kindness and compassion make a person attractive." And all of God's compassionate people said, "**Amen!**"