

March 11, 2012

Questions for Lent and Easter
The Compassion Question
John 5:1-9

Opening Words: John Simone Sr. once said, "*The key to wisdom is knowing all the right questions.*" I think he is right. Even without answers, questions have value. After all, what is a question? A question is nothing more than a request for more information. Only fools think they know everything. How many questions have you asked in the past week? How many questions have you asked in the past month? How many questions have you asked in the past year? Jesus asked twenty questions in the Gospel of John. Those questions are the foundation of my newest sermon series, *Questions for Lent and Easter*. We are going to look at twelve different questions the Master asked. Each one is an excellent question because each one is timeless.

This is message number six. I have called the message *The Compassion Question*. We find ourselves in the fifth chapter of John. According to the text Jesus is in Jerusalem to observe one of the three pilgrimage feasts. All Jewish males were expected to go to the Golden City for Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacle. It is while he is in Jerusalem he interacts with a cripple laying by a pool. According to the text the man had been laying by this pool for thirty eight years. This is the question for this morning. "*Do you want to get well?*" The answer is obvious. The questions reveals the compassionate side of Jesus. May God give you ears to hear this morning's Gospel lesson, John 5:1-9.

John 5:1-9 1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" 7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." 8 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

Cicely Saunders was led to Christ at Oxford University thanks to a colorful English professor by the name of C. S. Lewis. Lacking any kind of direction in her life she dropped out of Oxford and began studying nursing. Five years later she graduated and began working on a cancer ward in a London hospital. Gradually, she came to realize that most of the doctors ignored the patients who

were deemed terminally ill. As a result, she watched many cancer patients die virtually alone. Greatly troubled by this revelation, she developed a plan. She approached the hospital administration with an idea she had developed. She wanted to surround the terminally ill with friends and loved ones during their last days, rather than isolating them in sterile rooms with strangers. Her radical ideas were quickly rejected. Frustrated, she enrolled in medical school because she wanted her voice to be heard. Six years later, at the age of 39, she graduated from medical school and began to enact her plan. The news of her plan began to spread. Her concept became popular in England during the 1950s and was soon adopted by many Americans. Today, we know that movement as Hospice. How many people have you known have died under Hospice care? It all began because a Christian woman had compassion. Do the people in your life consider you compassionate?

There should be no doubt about it. Jesus was compassionate! We find that side of Jesus in the Gospel lesson for today. We are in the fifth chapter of John. The Master is in Jerusalem to observe one of the three Jewish Festivals. According to the text he is in the northeastern part of the city near the Sheep Gate. It was the gate used by shepherds to bring in their livestock for public auction. The gate was located in that area was two pools. In such a dry climate area pools of water were highly valued. These pools had special significance. They believed these pools had healing power. They believed the healing power of the pool was unlocked by the angels. Everyday they waited for an angel to appear and touch the water with her wings. If you could get into the water before it settled then you would be healed. With no other hope for healing the sick and disabled assembled daily. Verse three says the blind, lame and paralyzed were represented. Within the throng of desperate souls was the man character in this morning's lesson. I don't know why Jesus chose him? It could have been he was more depressed. According to verse five, he had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. Verse six says, *"When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"* (I bet it crossed his mind once or twice in thirty-eight years!) In the end Jesus heals the man and he becomes a living testimony of the power of God. You can turn this story a million different ways but there is only one reason the man was healed, compassion! Do the people in your life consider you compassionate?

Today, I was to talk about the role that compassion plays in your life. If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ then compassion must beat from your heart. I was you to consider these three things with me. First, **life is hard!** Is there anyone here whose life is getting easier? Second, **people are desperate!** Do you know anyone who is desperate? How desperate are you? Third and finally, **Jesus cares!** Jesus cares because Jesus is compassionate. If that makes you feel better say, **"Amen!"**

Life is hard!

This is point number one: life is hard! Richard Needham once said there are seven stages in life:

1. The spills
2. The drills
3. The thrills
4. The bills
5. The ills
6. The pills
7. The wills.

Which one of those seven stages are in you today? It really doesn't matter because every stage of life seems to be challenging. The spills stage comes when you are the youngest. I hear children cry daily in daycare. The drills stage is when you are in school. It is not just a time to make friends; it is a time to take tests. During the thrills stage you have to discern your future. I am in the bills stage. Does anyone here like paying bills? Is anyone here in the ills stage or the pills stage? That does look like must fun. Do you know of anyone in the final stage, the wills stage? This is the point I am trying to make. Life is hard! No one has ever told me their life is easy. If you will admit that life is hard say, **"Amen!"**

People are desperate!

This is point number two: people are desperate! This afternoon Kathryn and I are going to Cleveland to pick up our daughter, Anna. For the past week she has been in El Salvador. This have been her first experience with real poverty. Did you the average family in El Salvador makes \$400 annually? Did you know the average family in Ohio makes \$40,000? How do you exist on \$400 annually? The problem is not just a lack of money. The problem is a lack of hope. I can not say this too strongly. The people of El Salvador are desperate! However, you don't have to go to Central America to witness desperate people. There are many desperate people right here. There is a website called Daily Finance. They tell us only 14% of American who are 28 and 29 years old feel optimistic about their financial futures? There is a desperateness growing in our land.

Psychologists tells us people change when they become desperate. They become more paranoid, bold and unpredictable. That is the story of 36 year old Heidi Knowles of Vancouver, Washington. The only word you can use for her is desperate. She didn't have a job; she was unemployed. She didn't have a home; she was living in a hotel, nearly homeless. Some say she was suffering from postpartum depression. Some say she was just desperate. What everyone agrees upon is she tried to sell her three day on baby in front of a Taco Bell in July of 2011. She was will to sell her baby for between \$500 and \$5000. How desperate do you have to be to sell your own children? There are some desperate people in

this world. Do you know any desperate people? How desperate are you? Point number two is people are desperate. If you can agree with this point say, **"Amen!"**

Jesus cares!

This is point number three: Jesus cares! In a world where no one seems to care, remember Jesus cares! Look at the text for today one more time. Jesus is in the northeastern section of Jerusalem for one of the festivals. He passes by a pool called Bethesda. It is surrounded by the disabled. There are so many disabled that can not be counted. With all the sad faces in the crowd, Jesus picks out one man. We don't know why he was selected. Perhaps, the reason is was the most pitiful one near Jesus. His life wasn't Jesus just hard; he was desperate. He had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. His hopes had died years ago. His only hope for a for a healing was to hope for a miracle. His only hope of survival was the generosity of the worshipper, who came to Jerusalem for the festival. The only escape he had was death. Then Jesus came along and everything changed.

Years ago, Kathryn and I were on a mission trip. We were outside of St. Petersburg. It was a Sunday morning and the group decided to worship in the local Russian Orthodox Church. It was not one of those places tourists go. It was originally been built by a wealthy land owner, who had it constructed in memory of his daughter. We walked by the old family home. It now sits in ruins because the Germans bombed it during the siege on Leningrad. The church had two stories with two chapels. We worshipped on the second floor. When we arrived two things grabbed my attention. The first was the heavy incense. The second was the crowd. When we walked in the Russian just stared at us. Then they offered us candles to burn at the icons. When we decided to leave we climbed down those uneven stairs and looked to exit. However, it was hard to leave because the beggars lined the stairs. Have you ever noticed how beggars assemble near churches? They know it is impossible to experience God and not be compassionate. We had experienced God so we were compassionate. We were generous. There was an old Russian woman who had no leg sitting at the top of the stairs. She was clearly the saddest one. Kathryn reach into her bag and gave her the most. The woman responded with a toothless smile. She grabbed her hand and said, Thank-you, thank-you, thank-you." We were not just Americans on that day. We were Christians, who were representing Jesus. We didn't just give them money. We reminded them that Jesus cares! And Jesus cares about you. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

Let me end with the words of the great German Roman Catholic theologian, Henri Nouwen.

compassion is not pity. Pity lets us stay at a distance. It is condescending.

compassion is not sympathy. Sympathy is for superiors over inferiors.
compassion is not charity. Charity is for the rich to continue in their status over the poor.

compassion is born of God. It means entering into the other person's problems. It means taking on the burdens of the other. It means standing in the other person's shoes. It is the opposite of professionalism. It is the humanizing way to deal with people. Do the people in your life consider you compassionate? Will you please pray with me?