

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Quincy, IL  
Preacher: Seminarian Brandon Metcalf

Pentecost 2  
Saturday, June 13, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday, June 14, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

# “A Church of Compassion”

When coming up to a scene of conflict or chaos, you have a couple of different options. If you're a child, you look around for an adult to come help. If you're a youth leader or chaperone you look around for an adult to come help, until you realize that *you're* the adult and *you're* supposed to help! If you're a doctor, you took an oath to help, so you go into the scenario and say, "I'm a doctor, I'm here to help!" And if you're a tour guide, you just say, "If you look to your right, folks, you'll see what appears to be a kindergarten class that has tied their teacher up on the playground. Now it looks like they're organizing themselves into a tribe and electing their own leader. Anyways, onto our next stop!"

We have a lot of options when it comes to dealing with the trouble we see in the world. Like a child, we can assume it's someone else's problem. Or as a doctor or first responder, we can wade into the middle of it in order to try to help. Or like a tour guide, we can just comment on what's going on, stay at a safe distance, and then move onto the next stop on our journey. I think far too often, we're tempted to be tour guides when it comes to the troubles of those around us in our world. Just in these last few weeks, there's been plenty going on in our world. We have a global pandemic that is still affecting many areas of the country. The wrongful death of George Floyd has set off both peaceful protests for justice and harmful, damaging riots. Many police are trying to serve and protect, while a few are abusing their power in horrible ways. Social media seems to be filled with angry and divisive language, and many parents and children are just trying to recover from the challenges of school and work at home.

In the midst of all this hurt and trouble, oftentimes we get overwhelmed or even desensitized to it all. Even those that we acknowledge are actually suffering, it's oftentimes easier to just pity them- to acknowledge their suffering from a

distance without actually doing anything about it. If we're not careful, we end up like tour guides for the broken world: "On your right, you'll see injustice and racism. And up here on your left, off in the distance you can see fires from the riots. And up ahead is a business that had to close because of the pandemic." On this tour of the world's problems, at some point along the way we find ourselves only looking at problems and not people anymore. When we focus more on problems than on people, we lose sight of our mission as the Church. These are actual people that Jesus laid His life down for, that He loves dearly, and they are suffering. We can't turn a blind eye to it, or just acknowledge their suffering from a distance. Pity is not enough.

The way of Jesus is a way not of pity, but of compassion. In our Gospel reading for today, we see Jesus coming across hurting people. He saw crowds of people, who were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Instead of just noticing these people like a tour guide and then moving on, Jesus shows us a different way- He has compassion on them. Compassion is more than just acknowledging someone's suffering; compassion is also seeking to relieve it. Jesus doesn't just see suffering, but He enters into it and brings healing. He is not a tour guide, but a doctor, the Great Physician- "I'm a doctor...and I'm here to help." It's compassion that drives Christ to heal their diseases and afflictions. It's compassion that leads Him to Jerusalem. It's compassion that drives Him to the cross, even as these lost sheep reject Him and crucify Him. It's compassion that leads Him to say "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they do" to these lost sheep. It's compassion and love for His lost sheep that leads Jesus to stay on the cross, to His death, rather than take the easy way out. God vindicates Jesus and His compassion when He raises Jesus from the dead, bringing healing where there is brokenness.

When Jesus looks at our world, He has compassion. He sees those who are harassed and helpless, "like sheep without a shepherd"- and that phrase is not talking about you trying to do school or work from home or figuring out how to use Zoom. But He sees you and I, as we get overwhelmed with the trouble in the world, as we lose sight of people in the midst of the problems, as we as His church lose our compassion for the world. He sees you when you are a sheep who has forgotten your Good Shepherd, and He has compassion. He has compassion on

you, as a good physician and says, “I’m your Savior, I’m here to help.” His goal is not just to point out the suffering in your life that you cause, that affects you, or that you ignore in others. More than just pointing it out, He wants to bring about healing. Through His death and resurrection, you are forgiven of the suffering that you have caused or ignored. He brings healing to the suffering in your life because He is with you, no matter the trouble.

Because we have been recipients of the compassion of our God, we are then sent to share that compassion with the world. This is just what Jesus did with the disciples- “the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” The disciples might have been praying for God to send someone else, but the answer to their prayers was that God would send...them. You see, the laborers in the harvest field are not just pastors and missionaries, but all of us who have been recipients of the compassion of our God. Far more often than we think, God wants to send *us* out to this ripe harvest field, each of us using our gifts to bring healing to those who are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, as we bring the compassion of our Savior to them. We are not called to be tour guides, observing the harvest from the sidelines and cheering it on, but to go *into* the harvest with an attitude like our Savior: “I’m a Christian, and I’m here to help.” Imagine if that was what we were known as- that the world saw Christians as people of compassion.

Actually, I don’t have to imagine this Christian compassion, because I’ve been a recipient of it recently. My family suffered a tremendous loss earlier this year when our daughter Lydia was stillborn. In the aftermath of that loss, God’s people stepped up. They didn’t just notice our suffering from a distance, but they stepped *in* to help. We received stacks of cards from fellow believers across the various congregations that we’ve been apart of over our lives. Those that were local used their gifts to cook meals for us. Others that were farther away still sent messages and texts to express their care for us, and to share God’s promises to us. Those that had also lost a child shared their stories and how God has been faithful to them through their loss. So many who lacked a similar experience with loss didn’t allow their lack of experience to keep them on the sidelines, but

reached out to let us know that we're in their prayers, even now four months later.

Let's not be mistaken here, the Christ-like compassion of all these people does not *end* the suffering or the difficulties that we face. It almost never does, but that isn't even the goal. Christ-like compassion doesn't end the suffering or the problems for the recipient. But it points to the Day when that will happen. Christian compassion always points to the return of Christ and the promise of the empty tomb. Because Jesus lives, so will we. Suffering does not have the last word. Injustice does not have the last word. Isolation and loneliness do not get the last word. Jesus has the last word and He says, "Because I live, you also will live!"

This is the goal and the aim of Christian compassion- to cling to the promises of God in Jesus Christ. Our acts of compassion don't end the sufferings of this life, but they point to the hope of that promise in Jesus. They also send a powerful message to the person who is suffering. Christian compassion lets you know that in the midst of suffering, you are not alone. You are not forgotten. You matter to God and to His people. God's promises, His love, and the hope we have in Christ are still for **you**.

There are many people today are suffering from grief, loss, stress, injustice, unemployment, broken relationships, and other kinds of struggles. And in an age of social distancing and isolation, it is so easy for those who are suffering to feel alone. Friends in Christ, this world **needs** Christian compassion. Your community, your neighbors, and your family need your acts of Christian compassion. Let us be a Church of compassion: people who don't sit on the sidelines and just point out the suffering of others from a distance. But may we follow our Savior, who sees the harassed and the hurting, and who has compassion on them- going to them with His lifechanging gifts of forgiveness and salvation. My prayer is that we will all be less like tour guides and more like doctors when we encounter people who are suffering, people for whom Christ died, and tell them, "I'm a Christian, and I'm here to serve, because Jesus has first served me. How can I help?" In the name of our compassionate Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.