

Matthew 9:35 – 10:8

June 18, 2017

Let's begin with a little Greek lesson. The word, "splagnitzomai," is translated as "compassion." Jesus looks out upon this crowd, just teeming with hurt and need, and he has compassion on them. This Greek word literally means, "his insides were moved." In other words, seeing the crowds of harassed and helpless people made Jesus sick to his stomach – it hit him in the gut.

We can relate to that, can't we? We can relate to seeing something that is so terrible, that it actually makes us sick to our stomachs. Just this week alone, I can think of several examples of times I've heard a news story that made me sick to my stomach. I'm sure you can, too.

And sometimes that punch-in-the-gut feeling is more personal. This week a longtime family friend of ours died – he died peacefully after a long and good life. But still, when the news came I felt terrible. My stomach hurt. I cried. I *physically* responded to the emotion I felt.

We are people of flesh and blood, like Jesus. And the pain of the world – the pain in our families it affects us. And it should. That's how we know we are alive.

Today we get the reminder that Jesus knows that pain, too. We have a God who actually became flesh and blood; who does not let us sit alone in our pain, but chose to enter into it with us. That's love. That's compassion. Compassion is seeing someone else's pain, and taking it personally, and choosing to enter into it with them. And that's exactly what God has done in Christ, for us.

If you hear nothing else today – I hope you will hear this good news – that God has come near and is with you when you are in pain.

The Gospel reading today shows us Jesus in the thick of his earthly ministry. If you read the whole of Chapter 9 of Matthew's Gospel, you will see that Jesus has just been bombarded with the pain of the world. He just cured a man full of demons. He healed a paralytic. He raised a little girl from death and brought a woman back to health. He healed a couple of blind men and another person with a demon – one after another. When you read it all at once you can get the sense that things are happening quickly. The need around Jesus is just relentless! And so when Jesus sees this crowd of harassed and helpless people, he turns to his disciples and says, "Guys, I'm going to need your help."

He's going to need *our* help.

Jesus turns to us, pours God's own love into our hearts, and makes us a part of his very own body. So that we can go into the crowds and show people what God's love looks like. So that we can respond to the need in the world – even when it is overwhelming and feels relentless. This, friends, is the mission of the church. This is our call. As those who know the good news of God's love and forgiveness -- we are called to pour it back into the world.

So how is God's love working in your heart?

What do you see in this world that makes your stomach turn? Whatever it is, trust your gut. Let it lead you.

When you feel moved by an issue or an injustice or a need – go toward it. Trust that Jesus is sending you to be his fellow worker. Trust that as small or insignificant as you may feel, you have power, from the Holy Spirit, to bring peace to this world.

We won't be able to solve all of the problems we see. But we do have the capacity to have compassion – to walk with those who are harassed, to stand with those who are helpless, and to let their pain be our pain as well.

There is a group of people from Phinney who have been working together for 18 weeks with a curriculum called "Troubling the Waters." These are people who felt an ache in the pits of their stomachs about racism. When they kept hearing news of black men being shot and killed across our country, and other examples of racism, they couldn't ignore that feeling any longer. So they have been studying and confronting their own white privilege. They have been opening their eyes to see systemic racism in our culture, even though it's something that's hard to look at. It can be hard to talk about. And at the end of these 18 weeks – I'm not sure the ache in their gut is gone – in fact, it might be even more painful. They haven't solved all the problems. They haven't created the perfect 10-step program for fixing racism in our world and even our church – but they *have* done something powerful.

They have had compassion. They have chosen to enter into someone else's pain instead of turning away from it.

And entering into someone else's pain is perhaps the most Christ-like thing we can do.

And no, it's not always going to be easy. Compassion demands that we turn outward, and that we risk being uncomfortable or unpopular. But what else can we do? As people of God, as people who know the good news, what else can we do?

Because the truth is that all of us have been harassed and helpless at one time or another. We have all been sick with sin. We have been guilty of hurting others and contributing to the systems that harm the most vulnerable ones. We have turned from God more than once. We

have all been at the end of our rope, ready to give up, feeling frightened or defeated or lost. And God has come near to us, over and over again. God has shown us relentless compassion, and saved us when we could not save ourselves.

So we are free. And nothing can keep us from the love of God.

What will we do with such a gift?

What good is our freedom if we don't use it to free the oppressed? What good is our power and privilege if we don't use it to empower others? Friends, this is how God uses power! God uses power for the sake of others! And we are called to do the same.

It begins with compassion. It begins with listening to that ache in your gut and responding to it.

And we don't have to be afraid to step out boldly, even when it's risky, because God promises to be with us in all of this. God promises to go with us, and forgive us when we get it wrong, and to work healing through us.

Trust your gut. Trust the Holy Spirit to give you all the words and strength you need to respond to the pain of the world. And with Christ's help, go in peace, and share the good news.

Thanks be to God. Amen.