

Gaylord United Church of Christ

Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 14, 2020

Too Wonderful?



Morning Meditation

Henri J.M. Nouwen, 20th century

"Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless."

The Call

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth. Worship God with gladness; come into God's presence with singing. Know that the Sovereign is God. It is God that made us, and we are God's; we are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture. Enter God's gates with thanksgiving, and God's courts with praise. Give thanks to God, bless God's name. For God is good; God's steadfast love endure forever, and God's faithfulness to all generations.

Prelude

Sandy Wentzloff

Welcome and News of the Church

Due to the increase of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Sibley County and the cases in Oak Terrace, we are suspending worship indefinitely until we can see how the virus is progressing. We will keep you updated through email/mail and calling tree. Keep us all in your prayers during this time of difficult decisions that affect so many people with such a deadly virus.

Gathering Hymn *"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"* vs 1, 3, & 4 NCH #304

**All hail the power of Jesus' name! Let angels prostrate fall.
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Christ servant of all.
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Christ servant of all.**

**All heirs of Israel's chosen race, now ransomed from the fall,
Proclaim the wonders of God's grace, and crown Christ healer of all.
Proclaim the wonders of God's grace, and crown Christ healer of all.**

**Before the cross, with heaven's throng, we on our knees shall fall!
We'll join the everlasting song, and crown Christ savior of all.
We'll join the everlasting song, and crown Christ savior of all.**

Call to Worship

One: Strangers visit Abraham and Sarah, and they welcome them with a feast!

People: How wonderful!

One: Strangers promise Sarah and Abraham a child in their old age!

People: Too wonderful!?

One: Strangers leave Abraham and Sarah To wait and ponder:

People: “Is anything too wonderful for God?”

One: Let us worship our Wonder-full God!

Invocation

Holy One, who we so often don't recognize, come into our midst and make your presence known! Renew our strength, refresh our imaginations, retool our weary efforts to carry your Peace into the world. Amaze us with your power to make all things new and let us face your world with curiosity and hope. In the name of the One who leads us on the Way, Jesus, the Christ.

Amen!

Gloria Patri

Glory be to Creator and to the Christ and to the Holy Ghost.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.

Eternal Life, Amen. Amen.

Prayer of Confession (inspired by Genesis 18: 1-15 and Matthew 9:35-10:8)

Leader: Like Sarah and Abraham, we may be discouraged, tired of waiting for a future that seems impossible

People: Is anything too wonderful for God?

Leader: Oh God, you call us to seek you in all times and places, and work with courage to prepare the way for your Kin-dom, but our resolve too often fails and we give up too soon.

People: Holy One, Have mercy.

Leader: Oh God, you call us to offer peace to friends and strangers to prepare the way for your Kin-dom, but we fail to cultivate the spirit of peace in our own lives.

People: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Oh God, you call us to be full of joyful confidence to prepare the way for your Kin-dom, but anxious doubt often burdens us and blocks our witness to your good news.

People: Holy One, have mercy.

Words of Assurance

One: Sarah laughed at first, doubting God's promise; Sarah laughed at last, delighted at God's promise fulfilled. May we laugh in hope and delight in pondering: How wonderful: In Christ, our sins are forgiven!

People: Thanks be to God!

Scripture

Genesis 18:1-15, (21:1-7), Matthew 9:35-10:8, (9-23)

Genesis 18: 1-15

18The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³He said, 'My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.' ⁶And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.' ⁷Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to

prepare it. ⁸Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' ¹⁰Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' ¹³The LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?"' ¹⁴Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.' ¹⁵But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'Oh yes, you did laugh.'

²¹The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. ²Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. ⁴And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶Now Sarah said, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.' ⁷And she said, 'Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'

Matthew 9:35 – 10:8

³⁵ Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'

¹⁰Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." ⁸Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

Message

"HARVESTERS OF COMPASSION"

PASTOR DENNIS

Grace and peace to you, from God, who raised Jesus from the dead. Amen.

This past week, Rahul Dubey opened the door of Washington D.C. home to 70 protestors who were being corralled and pepper-sprayed by police. With about 70 people sitting in his living room, Rahul provided milk for wiping eyes and faces to stop the stinging tears. The 70 spent the night and stayed until the city's curfew ended at 6:00 a.m. the next morning.

-It happened last year, after devastating attacks in New Zealand's Christchurch mosques, 95 year-old John Sato decided to join a march against racism to show his support for the Muslim people. He took 4 buses to get to there. "I thought it was so sad," he said, "You can just feel the suffering of the people."

-And then speaking to a news reporter this past week, the Houston Texas chief of police said, "Compassion is not weakness. The only way to overcome hate is love and encouragement." What strikes me in all of these incidents is **compassion**- people feeling and entering into the hurt of others. And what strikes me in all the many words that we find in our gospel reading for today is one word- the word COMPASSION!

"When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

Today I want to focus on this very strange word, compassion, that we find in our gospel. In Greek it is the word *esplagchnisthel* and the word means literally "his guts were moved." It is a very earthy word and has a visceral sense to it. *Esplagchnisthel* means literally that Jesus innards - his guts - were moved with deep feeling for the people. We can make compassion very abstract and intellectual. Yet, our deepest feelings begin in the body. Whether it is love, or hurt or compassion, you feel it don't you? It is in your gut- in your innards! As Jesus saw the people, he felt their pain and hurt in his own gut!

The depth of Jesus' feeling for the "harassed and helpless" people in our gospel, shows us the very heart of God. How many of us have known times in our lives, perhaps even now, when we have felt "harassed and helpless?" Those whose relationship with their children or spouse or parent is simply not what they imagined? Those who feel they are seen, and dismissed, because of their age, gender or ethnicity? Those coping with lingering health issues? Those retirees who wonder if they are valued anymore and have a purpose in life. Those who are struggling with loss, frustration or loneliness during this time of the pandemic crisis. If we take the time and allow ourselves to be honest, many of us have and perhaps do feel "harassed and helpless." Please know that feeling "harassed and helpless" is not a sign of weakness or failure but of being human! Jesus did not come primarily to teach or inspire, let alone judge, but rather out of the abundant compassion of God for the world and in order to demonstrate God's loving compassion through word and deed. Jesus saw- really saw- the crowds and he felt their pain in his own gut. My friend, when you and I feel "harassed and helpless" today, Jesus feels the same for us! He enters our hurt and suffers with us!

It's clear that compassion was at the heart of Jesus' life and ministry, so shouldn't it be for us too? After all, Jesus tells us that the harvest is plentiful. I take this to mean that we live in a world that needs more compassion. Hate, greed, self-absorption, and division are not working. Don't we need a more compassionate and tender world. We need a world where more and more people actually take the time to SEE people and then take the time to listen and to understand what their situation may be. That's what Jesus did! He really SAW the people and then he was moved to compassion for them why down deep in his innards!

A friend told me a story about his encounter with a driver with road rage. A while back, as he was driving a car came roaring up behind him. He didn't know what was happening, so

he pulled over at a nearby parking lot. My friend stopped and they both got of the car. The person driving was a woman who started yelling at him for cutting her off. He had no idea what she was talking about, as he didn't cut anyone off, but she was angry and started yelling at him so much that she was shaking. At that point, I would have probably run away, but what did my friend do? He said, "I'm sorry," reached out his hand, held her hand, and then proceeded to hug her. At that moment her yelling stopped and she calmed down. What a bold move of compassion. I told him that I'm not sure what I would have done in that situation. I don't know if I would have argued back, drove away or just listened, but I'm not sure I would have been able to hug her.

I asked him, what made you do it? He said he just felt something within him calling him to show understanding and compassion. It couldn't have been just the traffic or a car cutting her off, it must have been something else. Sure enough, as he engaged the woman in conversation, she shared with him that she had some heart issues and had just left the doctor's office. As you can imagine, she was upset and alone. My friend's willingness to listen and reach out his arms in love and compassion gave her the freedom to let out her emotions. We never know what someone may be going through, do we? In compassion we take the time to see-really see and to listen-really listen to what the other person is going through.

You and I are called to be grounded in compassion. The only source of this grounding is the love and mercy that God has for each of us in Christ Jesus. God loves us so much that God was willing and able to put us first and take our pain and brokenness to God's self. We have done our worst and Jesus has embraced it and us. We are loved without condition. Jesus didn't come for perfect people because God loves not the person we are trying to be or have promised to be or want to be but God loves the person we are! And how does God respond to us when we are "harassed and helpless"? Our God draws even closer when we are troubled and at loose ends. God holds us close. As we see in the resurrection story of Jesus, when we think all is over- when we look around and see no earthly reason to be hopeful- when we are harassed and helpless like troops scattered at the end of a battle, a fresh cry goes up. A new word is spoken. Something unimagined before begins to come to life.

Jesus puts it this way- ***"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into (God's) harvest."***

Bishop Patricia Lull of the St. Paul Area Synod of the ELCA says: "As Lutherans, God doesn't need us to make more Lutherans, who can fit into the way of life that became familiar in our churches twenty or thirty or fifty years ago. We are not called to make others into who we once were. That is nostalgia; not gospel work. No. God is looking for a very different kind of labor force today. God is looking for those who will speak up and show up and bear witness that we have a God, who grasps us with grace. A God who says- I claim you. A God, whose compassion is deep enough to hold others close, too.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." Beloved people of God, let me break the news to you. You are needed. No matter what your skills or age or where you are in your life journey, you are needed. Our world needs you! God needs you! Other

people need you and me. Jesus changed the world through his compassion. And in his name and by his power, can't we do the same?

Richard Dubey changed 70 people's lives by welcoming them into his home. 95 -year-old John Sato marched to support change. Houston Texas police chief change the image of a chief and police officers by saying "compassion is not weakness." Beloved people, world problems are plentiful, givers of compassion are few!

Hymn *"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"* vs 1, 2, & 3 NCH #43

Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to be found,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus you are all compassion; Pure, unbounded love impart.
Visit us with your salvation, enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe your loving Spirit into every troubled breast;
Let us all in you inherit, let us find your promised rest.
Take away our love of sinning; Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning, set our hearts at liberty.

Come almighty to deliver, let us all your life receive;
Suddenly return, and never, never more thy temples leave.
You we would be always blessing, love you as your angels love,
Pray and praise for your unailing, wounded arms out-stretched above.

Prayers of the people

One: In faith let us offer our prayers saying, "hear our prayer." For the peace of the whole world, and for our salvation, Lord in your mercy,

People: Hear our prayer.

One: For your church, and for all who minister in it, Lord in you mercy,

People: Hear our prayer.

One: For the leaders of nations, that they may ever seek justice and peace, Lord in your mercy,

People: Hear our prayer.

One: For all who are suffering with Covid-19 those who care for them, Lord in your mercy,

People: Hear our prayer.

One: For those who are in need, especially those who are hungry, sick, and dying, Lord in your mercy,

People: Hear our prayer.

One: For those who are oppressed and suffer injustice, Lord in your mercy,

People: Hear our prayer.

One: Bind us together as people of faith throughout the world as we pray as Jesus taught:

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen

Three Fold Amen

Amen, Amen, A-A-A-Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

The Psalmist writes: I love our God, who heard my cries and prayers!

Let us offer our gifts to God at this time, to support the life and work of the people of God in our community, and around the world.

Dedication Prayer

People: Holy One, accept these gifts and multiply them so that the wonder of your love, and justice and peace may be known throughout the world!

Sending Hymn "We Are Marching in the Light of God" NCH #526

**We Are Marching in the Light of God, We Are Marching in the Light of God
We Are Marching in the Light of God, We Are Marching in the Light of God.
We are marching, marching, we are marching, whoa, we are marching in
the light of God.**

**We are marching, marching, we are marching, whoa, we are marching in
the light of God.**

Benediction

Go forth from this time together, with hearts open to the surprising, inexhaustible love of God. Greet friends and strangers with the gifts of Christ:

Mercy, and justice, and joy. Expect the Spirit to meet us wherever we are, in struggle, in grief, and in peace.

Ponder: Is anything too wonderful for God?

Postlude

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Remember in Prayer: Bill Cowell, Eunice Gasow, and Aggie Schue. We pray for others who have been ill or are home bound and those at Oak Terrace and Golden Hearts. We pray for health and healing for all people everywhere. We pray with anticipation for the day we can all gather again with our church family. Pray for the ministries of our church. Pray for those serving in the military and for our local and national leaders during these trying times.

If you have a prayer request or would like to receive a call from Pastor Dennis call his office at 237-2595 (leave a private voice mail) or his cell 763-258-3371.

Giving our Gifts to God:

Tithes and Offerings can be sent to Gaylord United Church of Christ P.O. Box 385 Gaylord, MN 55334 or dropped by the church office on Wednesday between 10a.m. – 4p.m.

Pastor Dennis is usually in the office each Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. He can be reached at the office, 237-2595 (private voice mail) or his cell: 763-258-3371.

E-mail: dmckee545@gmail.com

Website at listen2god.org

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