

Chris Murphy
September 3rd, 2023
Scripture: Psalm 145
Sermon Title: Compassionate Christianity

Prayer...

Introduction:

I hope you enjoyed our summer sermon series on Pilgrimage with Jesus. I want to begin a new sermon series today on Compassionate Christianity.

Why this topic?

For the Church to be faithful to her calling in our world today, she needs to be seen as compassion personified. The church, the bride of Christ is to embody Christ's love to a world in need. The Church is called to be the hands and feet of Christ in our world. Only a loving and compassionate Savior will touch the hearts of our vulnerable world.

Every fall, I usually do a sermon series that reminds us of who we are as the Church universal and who we are specifically as Newberg First

Presbyterian Church. I am grateful to be part of a compassionate church because as I mentioned only a compassionate church will be able to make a difference in our community and in the broader world.

Our world today feels very vulnerable. People are struggling with anxiety about issues related to the environment- like fires and hurricanes, war- as we see between Ukraine and Russia, other foreign concerns like the influence of China, North Korea, or Iran.

Houselessness is an ongoing concern. Everyone seems worried about financial security and health related struggles like mental health, strokes, cancer, or other health problems. It can be scary as we journey through the human experience.

As we think about our calling as a church, I am reminded that what gives us hope and confidence is our relationship with God. I think we look for in God a sense of trust that despite the challenges in our world, God is ultimately strong enough and loving enough to handle all that is

going on. This is what our faith teaches us to believe. God is both strong and immensely compassionate.

It feels like almost every week, I read stories about the state of the Church. In these articles, I learn which churches are thriving and which are struggling. There are reasons given for why fewer people attend church. One answer given is that there is a skepticism these days toward religious institutions. Another reason for younger and some older people leaving church is the deconstruction of traditional faith. People are asking more questions and wrestling with doubts related to doctrinal beliefs or what it really means to follow Jesus.

I am becoming more aware that in one congregation there are many different spiritual journeys. Some of us have very clear beliefs about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, Salvation, Heaven, Hell, good, evil, sin, and others of us are in a season of questioning and specific beliefs feel less important than searching for an authentic experience of God.

Some of us are in a season of deconstruction. Others of us remain comfortable with the faith that has held us throughout our lives and see no reason to question the basic tenets of our faith.

Wherever you are on the journey of faith, we want this church, Newberg First Presbyterian, to be a safe place. This is a community where it is safe to ask questions. Where the most important truth is that God is love and we all are sacred expressions of God's love in the world.

In Psalm 145, God is described as gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Bible is full of beautiful verses and great wisdom. There are so many wise stories and words that we may feel tempted to consume them all. Maybe, we just need to sit with a few verses and ponder them. What are the verses that stand out to you in this Psalm. At our prayer retreat on Friday, we read a portion of Psalm 145 and took turns sharing which verses spoke to us. (Look at Psalm and share). Judy Landis noticed in her Bible that Psalm 145 is an acrostic

poem, meaning that if you read the psalm in the original Hebrew language, each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is used to begin each of the verses of the Psalm. I told Judy I would remember to share that with you all. I also learned that this is known as a song of praise that highlights the wonderful characteristics of God and that Psalm 145 is part of the Psalm connected in some way to King David.

The heart of this Psalm of praise is the proclamation that God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. Breathe in that truth. God's nature is compassion for all that God has made. God genuinely loves us and when we are hurting or feeling vulnerable.

When we are racked with doubts or questions, God is compassionate toward us.

Every Sunday, when we gather together, I think our first purpose is to receive compassion from God for ourselves.

I have a colleague in the Presbyterian Church USA, who is pastor of First Presbyterian in Bend, Oregon. His name is the Rev. Steven Koski. Steven

is a wonderful preacher and writer. On his Facebook page he regularly writes mini devotions. I was recently moved by his reflection on grace and compassion. He writes,

“The loudest voice you hear is your own inner voice. Sometimes that inner critic is harsh and cruel with a biting edge. This is such a time. I’m writing this for me hoping it might be helpful if you, too, are in need of a little grace.

Grace is receiving the gift of love and acceptance even when we think that gift is undeserved.

Our mistakes, imperfections and fears are just that...mistakes, imperfections and fears that come with the package of being human.

The harsh inner critic loves the microphone and hearing it’s own voice.

Unplug its speaker today. Let your inner critic know it has occupied enough air time and you are choosing to listen to a different voice.

Extend an invitation to your inner voice of wisdom and tenderness
telling her you are curious what she might have to say today.

Morgan Harper Nichols wrote:

“You have never shamed the waves for not arriving on the ocean shore
any sooner that they were meant to,
and you have never looked above you to guilt the clouds for taking their
time as they cross the noonday sky.

You simply accept these clouds must travel at whatever pace they need
to.

Oh, what a difference it would make if you gave yourself the same
grace.” Steven continues...

Imagine the voice of wisdom and tenderness saying to you, “The first,
last and best thing that can be said about you is that you are good. You
are enough. You are worthy. You are accepted. You are loved.”

What's one thing you can do right now to be kind and compassionate to yourself. Do that one thing. You deserve it.

Sometimes the best way to love others is to love ourselves with tenderness and grace. When we glimpse the astonishing light of our own being, it sheds the light helping others see their own goodness.

When we are kind to ourselves we are far more likely to extend that same kindness to others. Steven Koski in his post included an image of a cross and candles with the statement...

“To see ourselves as God sees us will inform how we see everyone else. In a time so full of hurt and hate, the grace of compassion can make a world of difference.”

This saying on compassion reminds me also of Martin Luther King Jr.'s I have a dream speech. We just celebrated the 60th anniversary of this speech, which took place on August 28th, 1963. King called our nation

to live up to the ideals of equality. It was a call to show compassion to all people.

I will remind you of a few of the words of this speech... King says,

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama... little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

King called our nation to show compassion as a reflection of the compassion God shows to each one of us.

Whether we are learning to show compassion to ourselves or to others it is a wonderful truth to remember that God's nature is to be compassionate to us and to the world. We are God's ambassadors of compassion.

According to one definition of compassion, it literally means "to suffer together." Among emotion researchers, it is defined as the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering.

Friends, we are invited to embody a Christianity that honors the compassionate nature of God. Whether you are filled with doubts about your faith or are full of confidence, whether you are experiencing deconstruction or find faith to be relatively easy, know that God has compassion for you.

Next week, it will be a great gift of God's grace and compassion that I am given the privilege to become your permanent pastor. What gives

me the most joy is that this step will confirm that are church is growing in vitality and health.

My prayer for our church is that we will continue to embody the compassion of Jesus. If we do, God will be faithful to continue to bring people who need a safe home, a safe church family, that knows a God of love and compassion, who is strong enough to hold us in the palm of her hands, and gentle enough to offer us and the wider world the compassion that will heal broken hearts.

Image of the cross as a dock in a lack or ocean, forming a T...Different quadrants of water. Some people are struggling to swim. The cross becomes a bridge or dock for people to jump in. We get to be like lifeguards who jump into the water and bring people to shore or to the bridge/dock where they can find safety and rest. The bridge, the cross is a symbol of salvation, a symbol of the grace and love of Jesus extending to those who are struggling to swim and need a safe place to receive

compassion, grace, and rest. May our church be the bridgebuilding,
peacemaking place, where compassion is found.

Please pray with me...

Psalm 145

A psalm of praise. Of David.

1 I will exalt you, my God the King;

I will praise your name for ever and ever.

2 Every day I will praise you

and extol your name for ever and ever.

3 Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;

his greatness no one can fathom.

4 One generation commends your works to another;

they tell of your mighty acts.

5 They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—

and I will meditate on your wonderful works.[b]

6 They tell of the power of your awesome works—

and I will proclaim your great deeds.

7 They celebrate your abundant goodness

and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

8 The Lord is gracious and compassionate,

slow to anger and rich in love.

9 The Lord is good to all;

he has compassion on all he has made.

