

SECOND READING: Mark 2:1-12

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When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ²So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. ³Then some people^[a] came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷"Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? ⁹Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? ¹⁰But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹"I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." ¹²And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

FIRST READING: 1 Corinthians 13:1-11, 13

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If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰ but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

This is the word of the Lord....thanks be to God!

“Please”

During the last 5 weeks, using Brian McLaren’s book, Naked Spirituality, as a guide, we’ve been learning to use simple words as practices to enrich our spiritual lives. With the first three, “*here*”, “*thanks*”, and “*O*”, we’ve become more aware of the presence of God, grown more accustomed to seeing and offering our gratitude for God’s good gifts, and we’ve also been reminded to praise God with our lives for the unfathomable wonder around us. Then we turned to more difficult tasks reflecting on the word, “*sorry*”, our need to keep our vital connection with God through confession, and last week with “*help*”, the word which reminds us to take our needs and pain to God, the only One from whom our comfort and strength will, in the end, come. Through saying, “*help*”, we are ultimately then freed to see beyond ourselves, to petition God to hear the needs of others. The word this week is “*please*”

The four friends of the paralyzed man in our gospel text today said “*please*” on behalf of their friend. They carried him on a stretcher toward the house where Jesus was, and when they saw that the crowd was too thick, they still found a way to get him to the One they knew could heal him. They, the story goes, climbed up on the roof, opened up a hole in it and lowered him on his stretcher down such that he would end up smack in front of Jesus. Very bold, very creative don’t you think? Well, Jesus was impressed their faith and he healed the man.

Yes, Jesus showed him compassion. Scripture testifies to Jesus over and over again showing compassion. “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*” he said. And indeed he did. Jesus removed unclean spirits, cleansed the lepers, forgave sinners, lifted the status of children and women. He fed the hungry. In fact, once when the crowds had been following him, all wanting him to heal their blind and lame, he said, “*I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat.*” And then he told his disciples to feed them all with a few fish and loaves of bread. (Mt 15:32) Yes, Jesus’ LIFE was all about compassion And his death? Also, about compassion. Jesus’ death was a sign that God participates in our sufferings, in the suffering of victims of oppressive powers...which justify injustice and condone violence...this he was resisting when he was killed. But also, Jesus participates in the suffering of victimizers for victimizers suffer in the

loneliness and forsakenness of their sinful, dark hearts. In dying, Christ entered into solidarity with the totality of the human condition, with victims and victimizers both. What wondrous love. What wondrous love. He died **for** us all, for you, me, for everyone. He died such that we may live. He died such that we may live...for him. (*pause*)

So, friends, as we live for Christ, the one known as the suffering servant, whose life and death was all about compassion, as we live for him in a world that is so full of suffering, we need consider what this means. Brian McLaren puts it this way, *“When we see all the endless suffering, will need ask ourselves, will we become more calloused, uncaring, embittered, or overwhelmed? Or will we strengthen the sacred connection with God and others, feeling compassion and desiring relief for those in pain? If we don’t strengthen the vital connection of compassion, we will slide toward the tragic disconnections of apathy, self-distancing, and despair.”* *“For a fellow creature to be in pain and without help in God’s universe is simply unacceptable to both God and us. We need go in between the two, holding the hand of God with one hand and with the other grasping the hand of our neighbor in pain.”*¹ Right. “Perhaps there is no more dangerous place for a Christian than to be in safety and comfort, detached from the suffering of others.”² We are, as Teresa de Avila famously said, “Christ’s eyes through which he looks his compassion out onto this world,”³ and we need be stretcher-bearers, extending compassion to all.

This means we need show compassion to all humans, those we know and don’t know, those near to us and far away. We need show compassion to nonhumans too, to all the of Creation. As the psalmist says, God has put us as *“rulers over the works of God’s hands, over all the flocks and herds, and animals of the wild, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea. All that swim in the paths of the seas.”* (Ps 8) Our son, Joel told us a story this week of how he and Laura tried to save a baby bird that had unfortunately fallen out of its nest, bounced into their open garage, and then gotten itself caught on a very sticky gluey substance. They finally freed

¹Brian McLaren. *Naked Spirituality*. (New York: Harper One; 2011), 126.

² Shane Claiborne. Clergy Coaching Network. Facebook. (Accessed 7-27-19)

³ <https://ocarm.org/en/content/ocarm/teresa-avila-quotes> (accessed 7-26-19).

the little thing and put it in a shoebox with some grass around it, and then fed it with an eyedropper and a Q tip. His description for the rescue was very touching. Unfortunately, their efforts were in vain, but yet Joel's words, the words he says to himself as a physician when he treats his human patients, rang practical and true, "*you're never sure if you're really helping in times like these, but someone needs to try.*"⁴

Yes, we need show compassion to ALL God's creatures. This also means we need show compassion to our enemies too. Certainly, Christ knew how hard it can be, but the cross was all about transcending acts of hatred and bringing peace with words of blessing, not cursing, words of prayer, not revenge, words of compassion, not retaliation. When we are wounded by others, brothers and sisters, and tempted, so tempted to label/demonize our adversaries in our minds, we empower them to positions they do not deserve...in there. Then it is only a small step to then demonizing them with our mouths (or someone, anyone who looks like them), and then well, it begins. Our first response to people who treat us badly should be to try as hard as we can to pray for them. It's amazing, but when we pray for our enemies we turn them back from being bullies into what they really are, human beings like us, with problems like us...fear, anger, scars, insecurity, tempers, ignorance, past contexts, etc.⁵ Imagine what our world would be like if we all did this, all the time, even most of the time.

Imagine... They faced each other in two long straight lines - just as they had so many times before on so many bloody fields of fire. This time was different. Three days earlier, General Robert E. Lee had surrendered the skeletal remnants of his hard-fighting Army of Northern Virginia to General Ulysses S. Grant. Now it was time for the Sons of the South to lay down their arms and give up their bloodied battle flags. Placed in command of receiving the Southern surrender was Brigadier General Joshua Chamberlain, a Northern war hero who bore four battle wounds inflicted by these men assembled before him. Absent in Chamberlain, however, was any animosity; present instead was a sense of compassion and respect for fellow countrymen who had given their all in the grip of war. At Chamberlain's order, there was no

⁴ Quote. Joel Ingrim. 7-24-19

⁵ McLaren, 137.

jeering. No beating of drums, no chorus of cheers nor other unseemly celebration in the face of a fallen foe. "Before us in proud humiliation," Chamberlain would later recall, "stood the embodiment of manhood: men whom neither toils and sufferings, nor the fact of death, nor disaster, nor hopelessness could bend from their resolve, thin, worn, and famished, but erect, and with eyes looking level into ours." At Chamberlain's command, the Northern troops receiving the surrender shifted their weapons to "carry arms" - a soldier's salute. Confederate General John B. Gordon, immediately recognized this remarkable, generous gesture offered by fellow Americans - and responded with a like salute. Honor answering honor. Then it was over. And a new day had begun. As Americans all.⁶

Imagine what the world would look like if we all regularly practiced compassion, if we all said, “*please*” on behalf of our neighbor, if we all took seriously our roles as stretcher-bearers between each other and God. Indeed, new life would be brought out of destruction, hope out of despair, growth out of difficulty and joy out of sadness. Imagine what would WE look like! Our hearts would enlarge and we would become more aligned with God’s. This week, friends, I urge you to practice this word, “*please*”. Look around. God’s creatures, human and non-human, who need God’s tender touch are everywhere. Lift them in prayer. Stand between them and God and feel God’s healing grace flow over you both. May the glory be his. Amen.

⁶ <https://www.jocelyngreen.com/index.php?q=2015/04/12/the-end-of-the-civil-war> (accessed 7-26-19)