

“The Compassion of Christ”  
Matthew 20:29-34

Our reading of God’s Law this morning reminded us that we are to be merciful, just as our Father in heaven is merciful (Luke 6:36). We are to show mercy to others, who not only don’t deserve it, but deserve just the opposite. Jesus gave us the perfect example of this in the parable of the Good Samaritan. When one of the lawyers asked Him what a man must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus asked him what he thought. He said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus said, “‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.’ But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” Well, Jesus didn’t just tell him who his neighbor was, but showed him by means of a story what a neighbor does. He said, “A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. And by chance a certain priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him, and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you.’” Now having said this, Jesus wanted to see if the man understood. So He asked, “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ *hands*?” Was it his countrymen? The two Jews who passed by on the other side? Or was it this hated Samaritan? The man answered correctly. He said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” It was the Samaritan. “You’re right,” Jesus said. “And now what you need to do is ‘go and do the same,’ to all men, whether they are friends or enemies” (Luke 10:27-37).

This morning, Jesus gives us a wonderful example of the mercy and compassion that is in His own heart toward those who belong to Him in the healing of these two blind men. Through this, I pray that the Spirit of God will encouraged us to feel the same compassion and to show the same mercy toward others.

Our story begins with the final leg of Christ’s journey to Jerusalem. Jesus and His disciples were just leaving Jericho with a great crowd of people following them, when two blind men, who were sitting by the side of the road, realizing that Jesus was passing by, suddenly began to cry out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” (v. 30). Now we don’t know the names of both of these men, but we do know one of them. His name was Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. Mark in his Gospel tells us about Bartimaeus without even mentioning the other man, probably because he was more outspoken. These men were undoubtedly sitting on the side of the road outside of Jericho because they were beggars. A blind man would have had a very difficult time making a living in Israel in those days. Unless you could farm, or had a trade, or didn’t need to work because you were rich, you would be in constant danger of starving to death. To save yourself and your family, you would need to beg. And, of course, if you’re going to beg, sitting in a busy area, where lots of people go by, would be the best place to do it, rather

than off in a corner somewhere. Just think about all the beggars we see around us in Modesto. They don't sit in the fields, or stand on the street corners in our neighborhoods looking for handouts. They stand on the busy street corners of the main roads, or on freeway off-ramps, next to stop lights, so that more people can see them. The more there are who see their need, the more likely they will be to receive some help. At the time Jesus was ministering in Israel, Jericho was a rich and flourishing town, known for its many palm trees which grew all around it. There were many who came there to trade their goods. A man could do a lot worse than to sit by the side of the roads going into that town to beg. That's what these two men were doing. But as they begged, they probably never expected to have someone so important pass by, with something far more precious than a few dollars to give them.

But before we look at what they received from Jesus, we need to understand what these two men believed about Him. Look at what they said. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they immediately began to call out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" These were things the Pharisees would never have said to Jesus. They denied them all the way to His death. Those who follow them continue to do the same today. "Lord" is the covenant name of God. It's the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament name "Yahweh." Sometimes the word is used to show honor to others, like when we call someone "sir." But in this case it's very clear that these blind men had something far more important in view. They also called Him, "Son of David," which, as you know, is a Messianic title. God had promised to seat one of David's sons on his throne and to establish it forever. God also foretold that this man would be more than just the Son of David, He would also be the Son of God. As you know, this is something else the Pharisees would never accept. But these blind men accepted it. They knew who Jesus was. They also knew that He could help them like no one else could.

And so they didn't keep quiet about it. It's one thing to know that Jesus can help you, and another to actually ask for it. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we need help, help that only Jesus can give. And even though we know He can help and that He has promised to help, we're still afraid to ask, either because we don't feel worthy to receive His blessings, or because we don't believe that our problem is nearly important enough to bother Him with. These men didn't let that stop them. They also didn't let the crowd of people who were following Jesus stop them either. They cried out to Him for help. However, when the people heard them, they sternly warned them to be quiet. Now we're not really sure why they did this. After all, these weren't Christ's enemies who were following Him, but His friends, those who at least professed Him to be the Messiah. They shouldn't have tried to stop Bartimaeus and his friend from crying out to Jesus, they should have helped them come to Jesus. Maybe they didn't like beggars. Sometimes beggars are very outspoken and aggressive. They need to be in order to survive. But sometimes their outspokenness and aggressiveness can make them repulsive. People don't like to be around those who are pushy. Or maybe they thought Jesus didn't want to be bothered with these two men. Sometimes the disciples made mistakes and tried to keep back those the Lord wanted to see, such as the parents who wanted to bring their children to Christ so that He might bless them (19:14). Or it may have been that most of these people were only following Jesus because He was popular. He could do miracles, and people like to see the miraculous. It may be that many of them were Christians in name only, but not really. It would be only a few short days from then that most of them would cry out for His crucifixion. This wouldn't have been the first time that those who profess to know Christ have

hindered others who are truly reaching out to Him from coming. But even though the crowd tried to stop them, “they cried out all the more, saying, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!’” (v. 31). The interesting thing is that when Jesus finally called them, Mark says that the crowd told them to take courage (Mark 10:49). It almost seems hypocritical.

But their perseverance finally paid off. “Jesus stopped and called them, and said, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ They said to Him, ‘Lord, we want our eyes to be opened.’ And moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him” (vv. 32-34). Jesus understood that they knew who He was. He probably heard them the first time they called out to Him. But He didn’t answer them, most likely because He wanted to see if they would persevere. Jesus did this once before with the Syrophenician woman, to test her faith. Now He was testing their faith. And when they were finally brought to Him, and He heard what they wanted, He was moved with compassion. He knew what it was to be weak. He could sympathize with their situation. Even though He had never been blind, He knew that being blind made their lives very difficult. He could enter into their distress. He could feel their pain. But what probably moved His heart more than anything else was the fact that these two men knew Him. They were His children. They had confessed Him to be the Lord. They recognized Him as the Son of David, the Messiah. And so Jesus, moved with compassion, reached out and touched their eyes and healed them. In Mark, Jesus tells Bartimaeus that his faith actually saved him (10:52). We should assume that the same happened with the other blind man, because notice what both of them did after they were healed. They immediately began to follow Jesus. When these beggars sat down by the road of Jericho that morning, they probably never expected to receive more than a few dollars worth of change. But what they received instead was the healing of their eyes, and much more importantly, the healing of their souls. And how did this blessing come to them? It came through faith. It was through faith in Christ, that they were made whole.

Now what can we learn from this story of the two blind men? First, we need to see that we are also beggars, like they were. We, like them, came into this world spiritually dead, blind to the things of the Lord, and in absolute spiritual poverty. We didn’t have any claim on the blessings of God, especially the blessing of salvation. But God had mercy on us. His heart was moved with compassion. While we were yet sinners, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins. While we were completely ignorant of His mercy and grace, He sent His messengers to preach the Gospel to us. While we were His enemies and blind to the spiritual beauty of Christ, He sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts to work faith in them, to open our eyes to that beauty, to make us love Him. And even though the devil may have used many in the church and in the world to keep us away from Christ, yet God gave us the grace to persevere until we finally came to Him and embraced Him savingly. The first thing we can learn here is the compassion of the Lord toward us who believe. If it hadn’t been for His mercy, we would all have been lost forever. We owe the Lord everything. Now what should we give Him in return? We should give Him everything we have -- all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and strength; all our time, talents, and resources --, for the rest of our days. We should follow Him and walk in His ways. Can we do anything less?

The second thing we should learn is, that if you’re not a Christian here this morning, Christ, by His love and compassion, calls you to come to Him. Look at what He did for sinners. Look at His sufferings and His dying love. He stands and calls to you who will hear

and answer, “Come to Me, and I will give you life.” Don’t let doubt stand in your way. Don’t let the world, or those who call themselves Christians, but don’t live like Christians, keep you away. Push forward to Christ. Take hold of Him by faith and receive His life. He calls to you this morning. Don’t turn away from Him, but receive His love and mercy to sinners like you.

The third thing we need to learn from this passage is that Jesus is not only concerned about our spiritual needs, but also our material needs. Whatever your struggles are here this morning, whether they are physical or financial, put your trust in the Lord. Persevere in prayer. Ask, seek, knock, until He gives you what you have asked for. But please also remember, the Lord doesn’t always give us what we want, but He always gives us what we need.

The last thing we need to learn is that our Lord wants us to imitate His compassion and mercy. Jesus has given us an example that we should follow in His steps. He has shown us by His own life how He wants us to live. We need to pray that He will give to us a heart of compassion, that we would be willing to show mercy to all, even to our enemies, even as He and His Father have done. If His love had been shut off towards us, we would have died. If we shut off our love towards others, they may die as well. Let’s be willing then to share our material goods with others, especially the poor who can’t repay us. But most of all, let’s be willing to share the Gospel with those who are spiritually poor, that they might become rich in Christ. May our gracious God apply His Word to our hearts this morning by His Spirit. Amen.