

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, July 31 – August 6 (A) – Matthew 14:13-21

Tips of Discipleship: *Have Compassion*

Focus Question: *When have you been moved by compassion to help someone?*

word of life

“When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.” Matthew 14:14 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 14:13-21

Matthew 14 begins with the story of the gruesome death of John the Baptist, a cousin of Jesus. The head of John is presented on a platter at Herod's birthday party. When Jesus hears this news, he withdraws in a boat to a deserted place.

1. *What impact might the news of the death of his cousin have on Jesus?*
2. *How much compassion did Herod extend to John the Baptist?*

Somehow the crowds hear about the location of Jesus and interrupt his grief by finding him. By the time he comes on shore, a great crowd has gathered. Note the reaction of Jesus to the crowd.

3. *How does Jesus respond to the crowd?*
4. *How is Jesus able to move from his own grief over the death of John and reach out in compassion?*

Jesus spends the day healing the sick and responding to the needs of the people. By evening, people are getting hungry. The disciples realize the dilemma and want to send the people away to buy their own food, but Jesus has a different solution. He wants the crowd to stay and the disciples to feed them.

That idea must have sounded like a crazy suggestion to his followers. The inventory of food included five loaves and two fish. That will not go far in a crowd of five thousand men plus women and children.

5. *At this point, what might be going through the minds of the disciples?*
6. *How would you describe the compassion of Jesus?*

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.” (Matthew 14:19 NRSV) Jesus blessed the bread, broke it, and gave it away. Those actions say a lot about the ways of Jesus. On that day, the crowd of thousands is satisfied. There are even leftovers.

The feeding of the thousands with bread and fish is a story of grace upon grace, when compassion triumphs. This meal of grace is sparked and motivated by the love and compassion of Jesus. What a stark contrast to Herod's birthday feast where pleasure and jealousy rules, resulting in the death of an innocent man. Yet both stories reside next to each other in Matthew 14:1-21. We can learn much from Jesus and his response to his cousin's death. Despite it all, Jesus remains centered in love and compassion.

7. *What surprises you the most from this story?*
8. *What in Jesus allows him to reach out to others with compassion?*
9. *How might Jesus reach out to you in compassion?*

word among us

After Hurricane Katrina and the breach of the levees in New Orleans, people were left stranded on the top of houses and businesses. Search and rescue teams were sent, but the destruction was massive with limited resources and communication. The human cries for help were deafening – even though there were no microphones on those stranded rooftops. Scenes of the devastation have been etched in the memories of any who watched television during the recovery efforts.

People throughout the country and world responded with heartfelt compassion, reaching out to those in need. At the time of Hurricane Katrina, the experts predicted a twenty-five year recovery period. Years later, the story of response continues as people of compassion continue to travel to the New Orleans area to provide hope, skills, and love.

1. *How long does it take to recover from trauma?*
2. *How might acts of compassion differ at the time of a disaster as opposed to years later?*

Compassion is defined in Webster's dictionary as "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it." It is one thing to sympathize with someone. It is something else to feel a desire to alleviate the suffering or distress. The word "compassion" is composed of the prefix "com" meaning "with" and 'pati' meaning "to bear" or "to suffer" as in the word "patience". The Greek word reflects a deep wrenching movement from the depth of the bowels. In other words, Jesus responds to the suffering of people from the depth of his being.

3. *Describe a time when you felt compassion extended to you.*
4. *What does it feel like to have someone alleviate your suffering?*
5. *What does it feel like to have someone ignore your suffering?*

Some people seem to be natural and gifted at detecting the needs of others. With or without training, they seem to know how to respond and act on that knowledge. They ooze compassion. In other cases, the pain of seeing someone in pain is too difficult to bear and immobilizes the viewer. Yet in the same situation, other people remain unmoved and can not detect pain in another human, even if it is obvious.

6. *Why do some people reach out with acts of compassion while others don't?*
7. *What makes a person no longer able to see suffering and feel compassion?*

Despite hearing the details of the horrific death of John the Baptist, Jesus still was able to have compassion for those in need. The times in which Jesus lived were not easy. Plus, people had basic needs. They became hungry or sick. Jesus not only saw their distress, but acted to alleviate it.

8. *How might you more actively respond to those in need?*
9. *How might you act to alleviate the suffering of someone this week?*

Prayer

Jesus, we have so much to learn from you. Remove the clutter from our hearts and fill us with compassion. Help us to reach out to feed the hungry, heal the sick, care for those in need, and share your love. Amen

Dig Deeper

Matthew 55:1-5

last word

Take time to look around you. Who might God be calling you to reach with an act of compassion?



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

Copyright © 2008 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

May be reproduced for local, non-sale use provided the above copyright notice is included.

www.elca.org/evangelizingchurch/dailydiscipleship

July 31 – August 6 (A) Page 2 of 2