

June 28, 2009

Theme: Compassion Mark 5: 21-43

By Terry and Fred Quinn

Terry: Since today's theme is "compassion". I'd like to begin with synonyms for the word compassion as listed in the online thesaurus. They are:

benevolence, charity, clemency, commiseration, compunction, condolence, consideration, empathy, fellow feeling, grace, heart, humaneness, humanity, kindness, mercy, soft heartedness, softness, sorrow, sympathy, tenderheartedness, tenderness, yearning

Keeping these words in mind, especially the word, "empathy" which was recently in the news, let us go to the scenes of today's gospel. We hear the stories of 2 healings, healings which reach beyond that of physical healing and incorporate Jesus' innate empathy along with so many of the other words I just read.

Jesus is again followed by a crowd. Though he is surrounded by many people, he responds to the plea of Jairus for his daughter. Interestingly, Jairus was a synagogue official, yet he falls to his feet and pleads with Jesus to lay his hands on his daughter who is gravely ill. So we see this man, not acting as an authority figure, but as father who is probably at the end of his rope with concern for his daughter. In responding to his plea, Jesus is relating to the feelings of a concerned father, not to the fact that he held an important post in the synagogue.

However, the crowd scene then shifts to a woman suffering from a hemorrhage for 12 years, who kind of creeps up behind Jesus and just touches his cloak, thinking that just by doing that, she would be healed. This incident is not just remarkable because the woman's hemorrhage stopped, but because the woman knew that she could approach Jesus, touch him, and that she would not

be rebuked. Keep in mind that women were low on society's totem pole at the time, particularly bleeding women who were considered unclean. How many men would have acknowledged her? ---She might have even been rebuked in serious ways for having the audacity to approach a man, especially in her condition. Perhaps that is why, when Jesus asked "Who touched my clothes? Who touched me?" that when the woman finally came forward, she was frightened and even visibly trembling. Yet, she told Jesus the truth and admitted that she had been the one to touch him. Keep in mind how unusual this was, and how difficult it must have been for the woman to admit this before the crowd, who were probably looking askance at her. Mark tells us that a "power had gone out of Jesus." The strength, the power of Jesus' empathy, of his compassion was so great, that it superseded the shame the woman felt at having a bleeding affliction so disdained by the community at that time. Thus, the healing was an act of compassion—and commiseration, humaneness, with sorrow and sympathy for her plight and perhaps for the plight of all women at the time.

Jesus seems to have been able to handle crowds well because after the meeting with the woman, a group informs him that Jairus' daughter has already died, so why bother going over to the house? But Jesus, hearing this, continues on to Jairus' house. Notice that he asks that only Peter, James and John go with him, so as not to attract even more attention. This is interesting because Jairus was a "higher-up" so to speak and helping his daughter may have endeared him to the officials in the synagogue---but Jesus' reason for going had much more to do with his compassion for Jairus the father and for the girl herself. In his calmness, Jesus connects to the girl, realizes that she is not dead, but ill, and asks her to rise. We do not know what her illness really was but we do know that the child responded to the tender message in Jesus' voice, the voice of healing and compassion—and then the tenderhearted Jesus made sure that the child had something to eat, while admonishing the grown-ups not to broadcast what had happened, for the actions of Jesus were not for effect, but were his compassionate and merciful response to need.

Fred:

This is another story that illustrates compassionate connections. The story apparently can be traced to North Carolina and has traveled through multiple tellings all the way to the State of Washington. The version I first heard was titled “Old Joe and the Carpenter.” It originated in Appalachia and evolved to several versions and has traveled as far as the State of Washington. My favorite version is that of a great teller of tales, Pleasant De Spain.

There once was an owner of a small country farm whose wife had passed on and whose children had moved away. His only friend was a farmer who lived next door alone. They had become good friends as the years went by. However one day he saw his friend leading a young calf into his barn. Joe insisted that it was his calf and the two got into an enormous argument. Rather than hit him, Joe turned his back and slammed the door of his house. Both men were stubborn and stopped talking to one another. A month went by and Joe heard a knock on his door. It was a young man who was carrying a tool box. He told Joe that he was an excellent carpenter and was looking for work. Joe invited the man in served him some breakfast and took a liking to this fellow. He said to him “Could you build a fence for me?” “I can build you whatever you need,” was the reply. “Well, do you see that stream that’s flowing between our farms? That wasn’t there two weeks ago. My neighbor and I aren’t talking to each other after a big argument. He plowed a large furrow between the two farms and hooked it up to that large pond at the top of the hill. So this is what I would like you to do. I have a lot of wood out in my barn. I want you to build a tall fence along the river so I don’t have to look over at him. Could you do it?”

“I think I know exactly what you need” said the carpenter. Joe left for town and said he would be back before dark.

However when he returned, he didn’t see any fence. Instead he saw a beautiful bridge crossing the stream. And when he approached it he saw his neighbor crossing the bridge leading the calf with him. “Joe, what a wonderful idea. We were such good friends for such a long time and we both thought this calf was

ours. Please take him Joe. I really treasured your friendship and don't want something like this to come between us. "

Joe was deeply moved by the reunion and said "Thank you for the kind words, my friend. I'm sure the calf is yours. I'm sorry I doubted you. Come in and share a meal with me and this clever young man." Both farmers thought that they could give the carpenter quite a bit of work to do. He thanked them both and shook their hands but said, "I have to go now my friends. Maybe I'll come back to visit some day. But I have many more bridges to build." He bid them a good day and with a whistle walked down the road.

The Inclusive Community is known online as Christian Bridges. Bridges can be paths of compassion like the paths that Jesus walked as he showed us the Way. May we all be bridge builders.