

Listening with Compassion - Week 4 (Conclusion)

A Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

The formula is simple: if we wish to serve the Lord and be truly happy we need to love other people:

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends... (John 15:13).

And lest there be any confusion over the *importance* of this love, or its place in society, the Lord also says:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you...By this all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another (John 13: 34,35).

And if there is no greater love than putting the needs of our neighbor before our own, then there is also no limit to which we will go to fulfill that end.

For as the Lord said:

Which of you, having a hundred sheep [and] loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost" (Luke 15:4-6).

Even though these New Testament teachings have been around for millennia, **upon arriving in the spiritual world, people are *still* surprised to find out that the chief joy in heaven consists in helping others, in loving the neighbor!**

It strikes some people as "sad" when they are told by angels that the "*joy in heaven consists in serving others by benefiting them*" (AC 5084).

Others "*are astonished that the joy in heaven is...to will well and do well to others*" (AC 4721:3).

And many other people, upon arriving in the spiritual world, are said to feel "*greatly deceived*" in having been taught a very different idea of what will make them truly happy (See AC 541).

How could people be so mistaken about what heaven is like?

Why is it such a struggle for people to get their head around the idea that heaven is not about us, but about other people?

The Pharisees were shockingly "open" about their dislike, their distaste, of having to reach out and help people who are suffering and in trouble.

They quizzed the disciples as to why their Master ate with tax collectors and sinners.

They couldn't understand why Jesus spent time trying to help the neighbor who had sinned.

Spending time with sinners was "messy."

It offended their self-righteous sensibilities.

When the Lord overheard the question posed by the Pharisees He said,

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance..."
(Matthew 9:12).

Then there was the lawyer who stood up in the temple one day to test Jesus.

The lawyer claimed to love his neighbor, but wanting to justify himself said: "*And who is my neighbor?*"

Jesus responded with the famous parable of the Good Samaritan, and after telling that parable Jesus said to the lawyer, "*so which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?*" The lawyer answered, "*He who showed mercy on him.*"

Then Jesus said, "*Go and do likewise*" (Luke 10:29-37).

What was "merciful" or compassionate about the Samaritan's good deed?

We could say the whole deed was merciful, and of course that's true.

He stopped by the side of the road, healed the man's wound, took him to an inn, and paid for all the expenses.

But there's a deeper message here too.

The Samaritan focused his attention on the man's wound and sought to heal it, which, in the internal sense, pictures a person's desire to locate the specific "wound" or "hurt" of the person they're trying to help (See AE 444:14; AC 6628).

You heard in our lesson today that when we see someone in distress, who is hurt and wounded, we can take that as a signal that we are "*being alerted by the Lord to offer help...*" (AC 6737).

Our journey series in the BAC has been focusing these past 3 weeks on:

- 1. Listening w/awareness**
- 2. Listening w/patience**
- 3. Listening w/humility**

And today, our emphasis is on "listening with compassion."

Dressing the wound with "oil" and "wine" pictures the careful, loving work involved in this kind of charity in which the listener provides the "oil" of compassion and the "wine" of helpful, wise counsel (See AC 6377:7).

The Samaritan focusing his attention on the man's wound teaches us another important lesson, and one that may, again, catch us off guard.

We're taught that the angels are said to "*perceive nothing more delightful and happy than removing evils from people and leading them to heaven*" (AC 5992:3).

Nothing brings them more joy than *removing evils from people...?* Really?
How could that be enjoyable?
This doesn't sound like heaven!

But more to the point, how could this be any of our business?
Isn't getting rid of evils strictly between them and the Lord?
Why would we or angels get involved?

Cain had the same question: "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" (Gen. 4:9)

Well, it's important to understand the *context* here:

No one has the "power" to remove evil except the Lord so it's not that activity of removing evil that brings excitement to the angels
- that's sort of missing the point

Their joy, their happiness, is in the activity of helping...

- their joy is in being able to have the conversation
- working w/people who want to learn, find a better way forward
- their greatest joy is in being a listening ear
- their happiness is in being able to share the healing truths of the Lord's Word!

Point? People arrive in the spiritual world...

- hurt and confused
- they may have been taught terrible ideas
- they may have also done some bad things during their life on earth
- and nothing brings the angels more joy than in being able to show a better way forward...
...show them the paths that lead toward heaven.

This explains why the Lord said, "*I say to you...there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance*" (Luke 15:7).

So, now we're ready to turn our attention to that word "*mercy*" or "*compassion*," and what is meant by the Good Samaritan "**showing mercy.**"

In the simple formula we began with this morning, the Lord invites us to love one another as He has loved us.

And how does the Lord love us?

The fastest and most direct way to remind ourselves how the Lord's loves us is to examine the shortest sentence of Scripture: "*Jesus wept*" (John 11:35).

In our reading today, we learned that "weeping," when in reference to the Lord, is an expression of His mercy and "mercy" is essentially "love grieving" (AC 5480).

The Lord "wept" as He rode toward Jerusalem on Palm Sunday
- He wept because Jerusalem was a symbol of the church, and people at that time had lost their way...(this *grieved* the Lord deeply)

The Lord "wept" right before raising Lazarus from the dead because His *closest* followers still didn't understand much of what He had been saying...

The Lord's love is not hidden from us in Scripture...

We read of how the Lord "*groaned in His Spirit...*" (John 11:33).
How He experienced exceedingly great sorrow
There was an urgency, desperateness in what He was doing...
Saying, "Do you believe this?"
It all came from an intense, infinite love for the salvation of the whole human race!

The word "wept" occurs 45 times in Scripture and it is almost always in reference to the Lord's grief and love for all humankind.

The Lord grieves...

- anytime we lose our way
- anytime we are hurt or when we hurt others
- anytime we wander away from, truth and goodness, the life of heaven

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you...By this all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another (John 13: 34,35).

The book, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, has the wonderful statement that love "*is feeling the joy of another as joy in oneself*" (DLW 47) and since angelic "love" is full of compassion

...and, as we've learned today, unafraid to wade into evil, into the realm of other people's pain, suffering and sadness

it could be equally said of that passage that...

Love also...feels the pain, suffering and sadness of others as pain, suffering and sadness in oneself!

As we take the Holy Supper today, let us be reminded of the Lord's infinite love and mercy toward us...

- how, in His mercy, the Lord *aches* for our salvation, our happiness...

Let us strengthen our resolve to be like the Good Samaritan and "*show mercy*" to the people in our lives

- by listening to them with compassion
- by grieving when they grieve
- by rejoicing when they rejoice

"So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" The lawyer answered, *"He who showed mercy on him."*

Then Jesus said, *"Go and do likewise"* (Luke 10:29-37).

AMEN.