

June 14, 2020
2nd Sunday after Pentecost



The Compassion of Jesus

Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7 Psalm 116
Romans 5:1-8 Matthew 9:35 – 10:8-23

ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Fairview Heights, IL 62208
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ANNOUNCEMENTS: Last Saturday the members of St. John UCC in Fairview Heights were able to collect 510 food items and \$480 for the community food pantry. **GOOD JOB, EVERYONE!**

CALL TO WORSHIP:

God, whose imagination saw all that is good, beautiful, and loving, continues to see us as beloved children in the divine family.

The Word which called forth the stars in every universe, speaks to us of giving ourselves through the baptismal life.

The Spirit, which moved over creation, breathing life into all things, fills us with peace and patience, with hope and healing to share.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

God of all creation, help us to recognize your presence among us. May we greet one another as your precious children and as messengers of your care. Help us offer such hospitality to one another than even the most skeptical among us will be touched by love. You are love; in you we find hope amid our weakness and doubt. Let your glory shine in this place today as we lift up the cup of salvation and call on your name. Amen.

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Matthew 9:35 – 38 **Compassion**

³⁵ Jesus traveled among all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, announcing the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The size of the harvest is bigger than you can imagine, but there are few workers. ³⁸ Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest.”



MESSAGE: Verse 36 “Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

This single line might serve in some ways not only as an introduction to Matthew's characterization of the ministry of Jesus and his disciples, but might also shape our sense of our mission and ministry today: The New International Version (NIV) of the Bible uses the words "harassed and helpless," instead of troubled and helpless. Harassed. That's a word we hear frequently in our world today. It's a very powerful word. Harassed. Describing the crowd gathered around Jesus as harassed and helpless is a powerful way to view those people then, and us now.

Have you ever been harassed? My first thought is bill collectors or how about those phone calls you get over and over to buy this or donate to that? I would call that harassment. In more serious ways, how many in our community, if they're given the safe space to admit it, also feel "harassed and helpless"?

The young parent at her or his wit's end, feeling ill-equipped for this role, guilty about responding in impatience or anger to a child? God bless all parents who have been harassed by their children. Crying newborns, terrible two-year-olds, or teenagers. I don't know which stage of life children can be most annoying.



But how about the persons unexpectedly relating to a lost job due to Covid 19 and the shut down of most businesses? What about those coping with the death, or in the process of dying, of a spouse, sibling, or friend, especially at a time of this virus when family are not able to be beside their loved ones in the hospital.

About this time of year, the young people recently graduated from high school or college and see no clear future before them? How about the harassment from loan companies where college kids have to repay their student loans and can't find a job? **At this very time, there are many people around the world who feel harassed and helpless. If it isn't due to the Covid-19 virus, it's because people of color are being killed in our streets instead of due process of the laws of our country.**

When we share the truth of what we see on our streets, it opens the door to hearing the second truth of this passage: **that Jesus sees us and has compassion!** The power of this description of Jesus also rests in its truthfulness. **Jesus did not come primarily to teach or inspire, let alone to judge, but rather out of the abundant compassion of God for the world and in order to demonstrate that loving compassion through word and deed.**

And the thing is: these two truths go together. The first – the truth about this situation and need – opens us to hearing and being transformed by the second – the truth about God's loving response. Sometimes we hear the first part about being harassed and helpless but we don't listen to the second part.

The next questions are, knowing God's compassion for us, what do we do as the church to show compassion for others. As we consider our membership in a "white" church, we must remember that Jesus did not come for perfect people. The church has never been made up of perfect people. **We need God's help to guide us in following the compassion of Jesus.** How can we learn to be

more compassionate to all people, not just those who look like us?

Verse 36 “Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them **(all of them)** because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” How can we help at this time of unrest? I’ll repeat what Rev. Shana Johnson told us last week: “I think a good first step is to start with your personal story. How have you grown in your understanding about the presence of racism and white supremacy in our country, in our community and in our lives? What are the areas in which you struggle? What are the things you wonder about or do not understand?”

“How can white people start? By educating ourselves about the black experience. Reading, watching films, having conversations. By seeking to understand the justified anger and rage. By calling out family members, church members and neighbors when a racist joke or slur is made. By calling ourselves and others on why we think, act or respond in a certain way. By supporting black owned businesses. By working on our own racism.

“The important part is saying we need to start the conversation and commit ourselves to doing better.”
Amen.



OFFERING: Thank you for continuing your gifts to the church. The doors may be closed, but the work of the church continues.

LET US PRAY: (UCC Website) *A repeat from last week*
God to whom we belong, we know...

that each person is of infinite worth to you,
that You delight in all our colors, shapes, and sizes,
and that You dwell in the love that holds us together
as your One Body.

Held captive by the bondage of racism, we confess that at times we have failed to love -- alienating ourselves from You, our community, and our very souls.

May we overcome the temptation to live in fear:
insular and distant from one another.

May we find strength in You to stop quietly accepting the system that divides, excludes, and crucifies your Body.
Source of all that is just and true, fortify us with the courage and integrity to draw one another out of numb, collective amnesia and remember your love that holds us close.

Let us never forget who we are in You, because it is only in You that we are freed from the shackles of guilt and sin to act with sincere passion for justice.

Trusting in your future promise, we anticipate the day when racism will be no more.

Living and moving in your Spirit, strengthen us to be active participants in the fulfillment of that promise! Amen.



ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST: Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Rich Schmitt, Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard, Hanna Mosco, Bill Underwood, Luke Doctolero (Pastor's grandson).

OUR DEEPEST CONDOLENCES to Janice Petroff, Council Member, on the death of her brother Steven Petroff.

CONGRATULATIONS TO CHRIS BROWN, father of Madison and Lily, on receiving his EdD (Doctorate) from S.I.U. Edwardsville.

PS Whenever the Governor allows 50 people to gather, our church will open; possibly by July 5.

Peace and Blessings, Pastor Rosemary
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