

“Be kind and compassionate to one another...” Ephesians 4: 32

Dear Friends,

I am spoilt for choice as to what to write about this week. I could write about the disappointment that many of us feel following the football on Sunday night. I could write about the anger that many of us feel following both the violence at Wembley and the racist abuse directed at three of our players. I could write about the disgust that many of us feel at the passing of a bill in parliament even just today, reducing our countries commitment to overseas aid and the support of the most vulnerable people in our global society. I could write about the caution or anxiety that many of us feel about the complete lifting of covid related restrictions in England from Monday in the face, not just of rising cases, but of concern expressed from the healthcare and science communities and from other countries and governments around the world. I could write about the guidance that the Methodist Church has today produced for how we might respond from Monday when legal restrictions are lifted. (If you want to read that guidance for yourself please follow this link: [Coronavirus Guidance for Property \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/coronavirus-guidance-for-property))

However, what I want to write about is something which I think connects all these things together – the attitudes that we express towards other people and the way that we treat them.

The Gospels are littered with occasions when we are told that Jesus “had compassion” on the people he encountered. Sometimes it was the poor, sometimes the hungry, sometimes the sick, sometimes those who had lost their way and sense of God. In fact, I think a strong case can be made to directly link Jesus’ compassion for people with his steadfast journey towards Jerusalem and the cross. Jesus faced, death, gave up his own authority and life because of his compassion for us.

The Epistles often translate the compassion of Christ for the world into practical guidance for daily lives that flows from characters that have been transformed by the life of Christ at work in them. Hence the quote at the top of this letter. That is just one of many examples. Others include: the opening verses of Philippians 2, where Paul links the tenderness of compassion with the humility that values others above yourself; Colossians 3: 12, where Paul writes: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;” and Peter’s guidance in 1 Pet 3: 8: “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.”

To live out a compassionate life is to reflect the character and nature of God, as James succinctly puts it: “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” (James 5:11) And of course, that is the repeated cry of the Psalmist too. Compassion is the character of God!

And so, as Christians who seek to reflect the compassion of Christ shown to us, we should think carefully about how the words that we speak will be received by others – what impact will they have upon them? Will they build up or tear down? We should think carefully about the actions that flow from what is within our hearts – do we act to protect others, to lift them up, to honour them, to challenge hatred or injustice? Or do our actions abuse and manipulate others and so reveal the self-centredness of our hearts?

How are we going to let compassion flow from our lives into the situations that I described at the beginning of this letter? What might it look like for us to be compassionate towards: the disappointed ones; the angry ones; the violent ones; the abusive ones; the persecuted and abused ones; the forgotten ones; the powerful ones; the powerless ones; the anxious or concerned ones?

The literal translation of “compassion” is “to suffer with.” It has about it the sense of standing alongside and sharing a burden. It is summed up so well in the following words from one of our popular modern hymns:

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant too.

I will weep when you are weeping;
When you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
And companions on the road;
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.

When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony,
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
In the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear.

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant too.ⁱ

What does it mean for you to hold the Christ-light out for someone else's benefit? How will you respond to the challenges presented to us even just this week? What will your attitude be towards others, towards church, towards worship, as the legal restrictions upon us are lifted? Will you insist on your rights or will you “clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience?”

Every blessing,

Rev Tim

ⁱ Richard Gillard, 1977, Scripture in Song. StF 611.