

**Southport Presbyterian Church**  
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**The Compassion of Jesus**  
**Luke 7:11-15**

“<sup>11</sup>Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. <sup>12</sup>As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. <sup>13</sup>When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don't cry.”

“<sup>14</sup>Then he went up and touched the coffin and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” <sup>15</sup>The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother;” (Luke 7:11-15, NIV)

This passage is one of the most moving in the entire Bible. It is a beautiful picture of the compassion of Jesus. For the woman in this story is a widow who has lost her only son and her only means of support. Her situation reflects the plight of living in this broken world – a world of broken hearts, broken lives, broken dreams.” (William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke, Revised Edition, pp. 86-87)

This passage reveals a God Who cares so much for the hurts and wounds of people that He Himself is deeply moved. For one of the first things that should strike us in **Luke 7** are these words, “**When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her, and He said, ‘Don’t cry.’**” (Luke 7:13, NIV)

In this situation of a broken-hearted mother, Jesus is “moved to the depths of His heart. There is no stronger word in the Greek language for “compassion” than what is used here in **Luke 7: “His heart went out to her.”** In fact, this Greek term is used over and over again in the Gospels concerning Jesus.” (William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke, Revised Edition, p. 87) For in both Hebrew and Greek the word “compassion” literally means “a ‘gut feeling’ for the needs of others.” (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. I, p. 932)

Max Lucado says concerning Jesus:

“He felt the limp of the crippled.

“He felt the hurt of the diseased.

“He felt the loneliness of the leper.

“He felt the embarrassment of the sinful.

“And once he felt their hurts, he couldn’t help but heal their hurts. He was moved in the stomach by their needs.” (Max Lucado, In the Eye of the Storm, p. 54)

You see, “Compassion... is one of God’s virtues... The compassionate God is one of the essential marks of the Christian faith.” (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. I, p. 932) For example, in **Exodus 34:6** we read, that God is called “**the compassionate and gracious God.**” (**Exodus 34:6, NIV**)

We also see examples in the Bible where God showed His compassion such as in delivering His people from the bondage of slavery (**Exodus 3:7**) and in providing food for them in the wilderness (**Exodus 16**).

But we see God's compassion expressed supremely in Jesus. We see it not only in Jesus' compassionate acts, including His death and resurrection for all humanity, but also in Jesus being moved by human need and brokenness, and not only in this incident in **Luke 7**, but in others as well such as His feeding of the multitude (**Mark 8:2**), healing the leper (Mark 1:41), and weeping at the tomb of Lazarus (**John 11:35**).

William Barclay writes concerning Jesus being moved by the needs of others: "To the ancient world this must have been a staggering thing..." because in that time, "the Stoics believed that the primary characteristic of God was *apathy, incapability of feeling*... Now, no one can be greater than God; therefore, no one can influence God" by making Him sorry, glad or joyful, "therefore, in the nature of things, God must be incapable of feeling." (William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke, Revised Edition, p. 87)

But here in Luke we are "presented with the amazing fact of "the Son of God being moved to the depth of His being" for this woman in need." (William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke, Revised Edition, p. 87)

Jesus reflects what God is like. He said in **John 14:9**, "**Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.**" (**John 14:9, NIV**)

We see in Jesus that God is moved by the hurts and needs of people.

For us as Christians, who are to be like Jesus, it means we cannot allow our "hearts to be hardened" to the needs of others, that we "must respond compassionately to human need." (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. I, p. 932) This means allowing ourselves to feel – to have a gut feeling – for the hurts of others and to take action. It means not isolating or insulating our lives from those in need but rather opening our eyes, our ears, our hearts to their pain, their cries, their needs.

The founder of World Vision summed up well a Christian understanding of God's compassion when he said, "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God."

A second insight that strikes us in **Luke 7** is that Jesus took action in response to His gut feeling for this woman. We read, "**Then He went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up!' The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.**" (**Luke 7:14-15, NIV**)

There is a key point, however, to remember in **Luke 7** as followers of Jesus. Acts of compassion are not always clearly understood by other people. For on the heels of this passage in Luke we read these words concerning John the Baptist, "**John's disciples told him about all these things such as the raising of the dead young man which had just happened. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'**"

**"When the men came to Jesus, they said, 'John the Baptists sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"**

**"At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, 'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.'"** (**Luke 7:18-12, NIV**)

Although he was in prison, John the Baptist still was in contact with his own followers and had sent two of them to Jesus after hearing about Jesus raising the young man to life. "John had announced the coming of the Christ, but now he himself had been languishing in prison for months, and the works of Jesus had not brought the results John apparently expected. His disappointment was natural. He

wanted reassurance – and perhaps also wanted to urge Jesus to further action... In answer, Jesus pointed to his healing and life-restoring miracles. He did not give promises but clearly observable evidence – evidence that reflected the predicted ministry of the Messiah. ...In Jesus' review of his works, he used an ascending scale of impressive deeds, ending with the dead raised and the good news preached to the poor. In this way, Jesus reminded John that these were the things predicted of the Messiah in the Scripture..." (NIV Study Bible, p. 1551)

Apparently, close as he was to Jesus, John the Baptist misunderstood Jesus' acts of compassion as evidence that the Messiah had come.

We must understand as followers of Jesus that people close to us may also misunderstand our acts of compassion.

Our culture today sometimes misunderstands what compassion itself is as well as acts of compassion. For example, some people see any hint of compassion toward a person living a sinful lifestyle as condoning it. On the other hand, many people who live an open sinful lifestyle believe we cannot be compassionate toward them unless to do condone their lifestyle.

Both of these sides fail to see that compassion is not an endorsement or support of any attitude or behavior or lifestyle. Rather, it is a gut feeling for the hurting person whether this person even consciously recognizes that they are hurting. Jesus came to save, deliver and heal people – not to reinforce or bless any attitude, behavior, or lifestyle that are contradictory to His Father's Word. Jesus did not agree with sin, but He had compassion on the sinner.

I'd like for you to see a video of compassion from All Pro Dad. "Imagine training your whole life for the Olympics. That's what Derek Redmond did. And in 1992 Derek had his chance at gold. He lined up for his track meet. The starting gun fired. He tore past the other runners. But then he fell to the ground. He had pulled a hamstring. He struggled to get up and finish the race. Suddenly, a man appeared by his side. It was his father. He had watched from the stands as his son faltered. He rushed through the crowds and onto the track to help his child. He supported the sobbing athlete... and together... arm-in-arm, they hobbled across the finish line to a standing ovation." (All Pro Dad, familyfirst.net, Feb. 8, 2010) Note here as you watch the video not only the compassion of the father for his son but note also those who tried to stop the father – who misunderstood the father and his act of compassion for his son.

Concerning the compassion Christians are to have and it being misunderstood, one Christian scholar notes: "The compassionate Christian is committed to using his resources to meet needs. He acts instinctively, not stopping to count the cost, not questioning if the one in need is 'deserving.' However, he is realistic enough to know he will often misinterpret the need, be rebuffed by the object of his compassion, be rebuked by a secular society, and never attain the goals of his culture." (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. I, p. 932)

Finally, it is important to see that Jesus' compassion was shown to everyone. Like His Father, His compassion "goes out toward both the good and the evil, the deserving and the wasteful. It is need alone which stirs Him." (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. I, p. 932)

Jesus did not question the mother as to how her son died. Nor did He ask her what kind of moral life she or her son lived to see if either deserved a miracle. All Jesus did was feel her hurt and brought her son back to life and gave him back to her.

Max Lucado writes in his book, In The Eye of the Storm, about Matthew's account of Jesus healing people in Matthew 16:14, and how Jesus showed compassion to all. He says, "Matthew writes that Jesus 'healed their sick.' Not *some* of their sick. Not the *righteous* among the sick. Not the *deserving* among the sick. But *'the sick.'*"

"Surely, among the many thousands, there were a few people unworthy of good health.

“The same divinity that gave Jesus the power to heal also gave him the power to perceive. I wonder if Jesus was tempted to say to the rapist, ‘Heal you? After what you’ve done?’ Or to the child molester, ‘Why should I restore your health?’ Or to the bigot, ‘Get out of here, buddy, and take your arrogance with you.’

“And he could see not only their past, He could see their future.

“Undoubtedly, there were those in the multitude who would use their newfound health to hurt others. Jesus released tongues that would someday curse. He gave sight to eyes that would lust. He healed hands that would kill.

“Many of those he healed would never say ‘thank you,’ but he healed them anyway. Most would be more concerned with being healthy than being holy, but he healed them anyway. Some of those who asked for bread today would cry for his blood a few months later, but he healed them anyway...

“God’s goodness is spurred by his nature, not by our worthiness.

“Someone asked an associate of mine, “What biblical precedent do we have to help the poor who have no desire to become Christians?

“My friend responded with one word: ‘God.’” (In The Eye of the Storm, Max Lucado, pp 44-45)

Jesus had compassion on all people, anyone who was in need. He put no restrictions on to which person He showed compassion. When he wept over the city of Jerusalem, His tears were for all who inhabited that city – and that included the people who hated Him such as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, Herod, and Pontius Pilate.

May all of us have a Christ-like compassion that sees all hurting people as God’s children. Like Jesus may we offer our compassion solely because the need is there. And may all of us seek to become to the world the eyes and the ears, the hands and the feet, the heart and the voice of the compassion of Jesus.

Amen.