

McCabe United Methodist Church

Practice Compassion

Luke 13:10-17: August 25, 2013

Pastor Rick Fossum

Today, I'd like to start by telling you two stories. The stories are both different and yet, in one way, they're the same.

The first story is about a boy named Ted. Ted Stallard. This is a true story. Ted didn't like school and the school or school teachers, weren't too fond of Ted either. Ted would come to school usually late and his clothes were often dirty, torn and worn. Since he didn't like school, he didn't like paying attention either. He would sit in class and stare out the window or put his head on the desk and shut his eyes. Needless to say, he didn't do well in school. His grades were barely passing.

Mrs. Thompson was his fifth grade teacher. She heard about Ted from the other teachers. Mentally, she prepared herself. She wasn't about to give Ted any slack or let him disrupt her classroom.

But then, she happened to read Ted's school records especially the notes from the other teachers in his earlier classes.

A first grade note said, **"Ted shows promise, but has a poor home situation."** A second grade note said, **"Ted could do better. Mother seriously ill. Receives little help from home."** In the third grade file was this note, **"Ted is a slow learner. His mother died this year."** And from his fourth grade file, **"Ted is very slow. His father shows no interest in helping him."**

As she read those notes from Ted's file, Mrs. Thompson began to understand him a little bit better. She changed the way she treated him.

When Christmas rolled around, the fifth graders piled their gifts on Mrs. Thompson's desk. Ted also brought a gift. It was wrapped in brown paper with duct tape holding it together.

Mrs. Thompson started opening her gifts. The class gathered around her. She opened Ted's gift last. Out of his package came an old rhinestone bracelet with half the stones missing and a bottle of cheap perfume. The other kids snickered and looked at Mrs. Thompson. She silenced them by splashing some of the perfume on her wrist and she put on the bracelet.

After school that day, Ted waited until all the others had left and he went up to Mrs. Thompson and said, **"You smell just like my mother. And the bracelet looks pretty on you. They both belonged to my mother."**

Something happened to Mrs. Thompson that day, but especially something happened to Ted. Ted began to show improvement in his grades and in his attitude. He started to like school and get along with the other students.

A few years passed. Mrs. Thompson lost track of Ted until this one day when she received this letter: **“Dear Mrs. Thompson, I wanted you to know that I will be graduating from college . . . second in my class. Love, Ted.”**

Four years later, she received another letter: **“Dear Mrs. Thompson, They just told me that I will be graduating first in my class. Medical school hasn’t been easy, but I liked it. Love, Ted.”**

And four years later, she received this letter: **“Dear Mrs. Thompson, As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. (Medical Doctor). How about that? I am getting married next month and I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. Love, Ted.”**

You probably know the rest of the story. Mrs. Thompson attended the wedding and sat where Ted’s mother would have sat.

This is a story about both Mrs. Thompson who showed compassion and it’s a story about Ted who received compassion. It changed them both. This is the wonder of compassion. The blessing flows in both directions . . . both to the receiver of compassion and to the giver.

My second story is from the movie called ‘*The Elephant Man*’. The movie is based on a true story. It’s about a horribly disfigured man named of Joseph ‘John’ Merrick. John lived in London during the 19th century. Most of his own family had rejected him because of his ugly appearance.

One day, a kind London doctor discovered John working in a circus. He was one of the sideshow attractions. He befriended John and gave him books to read. He realized that John was a good person, articulate and intelligent.

A London newspaper featured John in one of their stories. Madge Kendall, a popular English actress at that time, read the story and went to visit John. She gave John a copy of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. John began to read to her. His voice was squeaky and weak as he read from the second act: **“See how she leans her cheek upon her hand! O that I were a glove upon the hand that I might touch that cheek.”**

As John read Romeo’s lines, Madge Kendall quietly sat down beside him and responded by reading the words of Juliet. When they were finished reading the second act, she leaned over and kissed his large, disfigured cheek. From that moment on, John Merrick was a changed man.

Again, another story about compassion. One person who showed compassion and one who received compassion.

Everyday, you and I run into people like Ted and John . . . maybe not exactly like them, but people who are in need of the one thing we can offer . . . our compassion.

This is how both stories are similar. They both make the point that showing compassion is good for both the giver and the receiver.

Compassion can be defined like this: *“Compassion is a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.”*

Frederick Buechner, a pastor and writer, put it this way: *“Compassion is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too.”*

We show compassion to others not only because they need our compassion, but also because it’s good for us. In today’s bulletin, there is this quote from the Dalai Lama: *“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”*

It’s good for us! Showing compassion to our neighbors, to the homeless, to the salesperson at K-Mart, to the new or odd student in your school, to the nursing home resident, to our own sons or daughters, too . . . you fill-in the name . . . it’s good for us. Showing compassion is always good for us.

Finally, one last story. It’s a story about a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years. Eighteen long years. We don’t know what happened to this woman to make her this way, but she was bent over and wasn’t able to stand up.

And then one day, Jesus showed her compassion. He was in a synagogue teaching. He looked up as teachers will sometimes do and he looked around the room. He saw her. From all the other faces in that room, Jesus picked her out.

This is amazing. She didn’t have to come crawling and bawling to him. She didn’t have to come begging and say, **“hey Jesus, would you help me.”** Jesus found her.

The Bible tells us, **“When Jesus saw her, he called out to her. Woman,”** he said, **“you are set free. You don’t have to be bent over any more.”**

The story goes on, but this is the part I want us to remember: Do you think she was ever the same person again? I doubt it. We don’t know what happened to her, but I’m sure she wasn’t the same. Like Ted, like John, and like others whom either give or receive compassion, she was changed.

Having compassion is more than just a command we should follow. It’s a way-of-life. Plus, it’s good for us.

I Peter 3:8 puts it like this: *“Love one another, be compassionate and humble.”*

Go out today knowing that Jesus goes out with you. Let him who has shown us compassion, teach us to show others as well.