

Compassionate Kindness
Matthew 14:13 – 21; Luke 6:32 – 36
Sunday, July 28, 2019

A couple of months ago, Jen and I went out to lunch on a Friday. It was my day off, and the kids were in school, so we went to our favorite soup and sandwich place. When we walked in, we noticed that it was a lot more crowded than usual. There was a big group of people standing by the area where they give you your food. They were standing there, waiting. Because, as we got up to the counter, we noticed that there was only *one person* behind the counter preparing food. There are usually two or three, but that day there was *one person* working the lunch shift. She was scrambling back and forth, looking at the order slips, and then trying to make sandwiches and put soup in bowls. She explained that the person who was supposed to be working with her had just not shown up. She was apologizing to all the people waiting, over and over again. You could tell that she was frustrated and overwhelmed.

Jen and I waited in line for a while, put our orders in, and then sat down. There was nowhere else we had to be, so we weren't in a hurry. We didn't mind waiting, and we understood how hard it must be for that one woman serving all these people by herself. So we certainly weren't going to rush her or complain. We sat with our drinks and talked. As we sat there, more and more people came in. The woman behind the counter would call out a name to pick up their order, but that person had walked out 20 minutes ago. People had put in orders 30, 45, 50 minutes before, and they just got tired of waiting. The people who were still there waiting for their food started expressing their frustration. They started *yelling* at her. "I *really* need to get back to work. All I had was a bowl of chicken noodle. Could you just pour that so I can go?" You could *feel* the tension in the restaurant.

As we sat there, watching all of this, I started to feel really bad for that woman behind the counter. I've worked food service before and dealt with busy lunch shifts, so I know how hard it can be. But I never had to do it *by myself*. So at one point, I walk up to the counter and say, "You seem like you could really use some help. Could I come back and just put soup in bowls while you make the sandwiches?" She looked at me, and I could see her hesitating, like she *wanted* the help, but there were all kinds of health code and workplace rules that would be violating. She finally said, "That would be awesome." So I went behind the counter, washed my hands, put on gloves, and started serving soup.

I had eaten there enough that I knew what all the soups and sizes were; I knew how things were served. So it was surprisingly easy. We started knocking orders out and catching up. But the thing was, more and more people kept coming in, and they hadn't been there when I went behind the counter, so they had no idea that I didn't work there. They're asking me for samples and all these questions that I did not know the answer to. And the funny thing is, they eventually started getting frustrated with *me* because service was still slow. But I'm back there having the time of my life. This was so much *fun*. I joked with Jen that it was like how kids dream about going to see their favorite rock band in concert, but the lead singer is sick and can't sing tonight, so they bring *you* up on stage to sing! That's what it felt like to me! Stephanie and I were back there slinging soup and sandwiches, feeding the masses.

Eventually, people stopped coming in, and we served the last ticket. We did it! We made it through the lunch rush! So I poured the soup that Jen and I had ordered, slipped out from behind the counter *right as her boss walked in*, and we finally got to eat our lunch.

Now, I really went back and forth as to whether I was going to tell you this story, or if I should just tell it as, “While we were sitting there, this other person got up and went behind the counter to help.” Because I didn’t want to paint myself as the paragon of kindness. Truth be told, I saw a bad car accident happen on Tuesday, but I kept driving right past it because I saw other people stopping to help, so I figured, “They’ve probably got this.” So we all have our moments.

But why would I do that? Why would I go back there and help her serve soup? I didn’t *know* that woman. I didn’t know any of those other people waiting for their food; they weren’t friends of mine. *And* they were being kind of rude. What did I care if they got their food on time? And even though I had fun doing it, it wasn’t because of what *I* would get out of it. It wasn’t like there was some reward waiting for me at the end. It wasn’t about *me*. That woman behind the counter needed *help*, I had *compassion* for her and knew that I could probably help, so I did.

What would cause those other people who saw that car accident to stop and get out and help? There was no reward in that for them, and that was *not* a fun situation. But they had *compassion* for whoever was in that car, and they thought that they could probably help, so they did.

There was a video making the rounds online this past week. It was a baseball game where the batter had just hit a homerun, and all these kids are scrambling through the outfield seats trying to get that ball. Two kids get to it at the exact same time, but one of them grabs it first. The other kid is naturally disappointed. But then the kid who *got* the ball turns to the other kid immediately and hands him the ball. In the video you can only see it from a distance. You can’t hear what they’re saying. But the one kid is so overwhelmed that he just hugs the kid who gave him the ball. They weren’t sitting together. They weren’t friends. They didn’t know each other.

Why would he give up that ball?! That's every kid's dream, to get a homerun ball at a baseball game!

Kindness is an *act* that shows love to someone else, with absolutely no consideration as to how it will benefit *you*. You *do something* for someone else without any thought about what's in it for *you*. In fact, a lot of times, kindness can end up *costing you something*. Kindness is not driven by what *you* get out of it or how it makes *you* feel. When you are acting in kindness, your actions are totally driven by what it does for *that other person*.

I think a lot of times we can think of kindness as just "being nice." But it's so much *more* than that. Kindness is about helping that *other person* find fullness and love simply because you *can*. Simply because *you* have the ability to share that with them. Kindness isn't worried about being *thanked* or thought well of. Kindness is focused on, "You have this need, and I have the ability to *provide* for that need, so I'm going to help you *just because you need it*." Kindness is *love in action*.

We see that in this story of Jesus feeding the 5,000. At this point in Matthew's gospel, Jesus has just found out that John the Baptist has been killed. John was Jesus' *cousin*, the one who *baptized* Jesus; he was a really important person to Jesus. And Jesus has just received word that John has been killed.

So you can understand that, after hearing that, Jesus just wanted a little time to himself. He wanted to be alone to mourn for his friend. So, it says, when Jesus heard this, he got in a boat and went off by himself. But the massive crowds of people that had been following Jesus around, they found out where Jesus had gone, and they followed him. Jesus saw the crowd and it

says he had *compassion* for them. That word *compassion* is made up of two parts: *com*, meaning *with*, and *passion*, which is from an old word that means *to suffer*. So the word *compassion* literally means *to suffer with* someone. To feel what *they* are feeling. *Their* hurt causes *you* to hurt. Jesus saw these hurting, tired, sick, hungry people, and he *suffered with them*. He felt what *they* were feeling. He was focused more on *them* than he was on *himself*. So Jesus starts healing them. Not because of what was in it for *him*. But simply because they *need it* and *he can*.

But then they run into a problem. It's dinnertime. And there's nothing to eat. The disciples say to Jesus, "Send the people into that village nearby so they can buy food for themselves." To which Jesus says, "Don't make them *leave...you* give them food." The disciples are saying, "Make them fend for *themselves*. Make them provide for *themselves*." But Jesus says, "No, *you* provide for *them*."

The disciples say, "We don't have enough *food* to provide for them. All we have are five loaves of bread and two fish." Basically, they are saying, "This is *our* dinner. Make them go find their *own*." The disciples are worried about *themselves*, focused on *themselves*. Jesus takes the five loaves of bread and the two fish, and he *somehow* multiplies it so that there is enough to feed *five thousand people*, not counting women and children.

Why did Jesus do that? Not because there was anything in it for *him*. He received no reward. In fact it doesn't even say that anyone *thanked* him. He didn't do it so people would *thank* him or say, "Oh, wow, Jesus, you are *so great!*" He didn't do it for *himself*. He did it because he had *compassion* for them, he was *suffering with* them, *he* felt what *they* were feeling. They were *hungry*. They needed *food*. And he had the ability to *give* them food. So he did. He acted out of love for them. *That* is kindness.

What we see here is that *God is kind*. *God* has *compassion* for us. *God* suffers *with* us. *God* feels what *we* feel. *God understands*. And *God acts* out of that understanding. *That* is what it looks like to be *kind*.

Notice what Jesus *doesn't* do here. He *doesn't* say, "I'll help you if you first help yourself." He *doesn't* say, "If you meet me *halfway* and show me a little *effort*, show me that you *deserve* this, *then* I will help you." He *doesn't* say, "Earn it." He *doesn't* say, "What's in it for *me*?" He *doesn't* say, "You didn't even say *thank you*." He doesn't do *any* of that, because that's not kindness. Jesus helps them with absolutely no thought as to what it does for *him*. His actions are totally driven by what it does for *them*.

Jesus suffered a painful, humiliating death on a cross, *not* because of what it did for *him*...but because of what it did for *us*.

When *we* are seeking to live in ways that are *kind*, our actions will be driven *only* by what they do for that other person. Not what *I* get out of it...what *they* get out of it. What can I do to help *you* find fullness and love and every good thing, even if it costs me *everything*? *That* is kindness.

But here's the thing: kindness is *easy* when you're doing this for someone you *love*, someone you *care about*, someone you *like*. But Jesus calls us to show kindness to the people we *don't* like, the people we *don't* get along with, the people we *can't stand*. He says, "If you love those who love you, and do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Love your *enemies* and do good expecting nothing in return. *God* is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

So be merciful, just as God is merciful.” And actually the Greek word there literally means, “have *compassion*, just as God has compassion.”

Jesus calls us to act in *kindness* toward our *enemies*. This person who has hurt you, this person you really don’t get along with, this person who you think is evil and awful, if you see them *suffering*, if you see them *hurting* and in *need*, what will you do? What Jesus says to us is, “Suffer *with* them.”

If we are seeking to live by the Spirit of God, desiring the things of the *Spirit* above the things of this world, then our lives will bear the fruit of kindness, *suffering with* other people, feeling what *they* feel, *understanding* them, and *acting* toward them out of that understanding. Not because of what it does for *us*, but because of what it does for *them*. *That* is the kind of fruit that can miraculously feed the world.