

VIRTUES OF A BELOVED COMMUNITY – COMPASSION

SUNDAY CIRCLE – 5 OCTOBER 2025

From Exodus and Psalms:

- “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (God speaking of himself to Moses, Exodus 34.6, NIV)
- “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great kindness” (Psalm 145, v.8; similarly found in Psalm 86, v.15 and Psalm 103, v.8))

From the Mark and Matthew:

- "Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' He said. 'Be cleansed!'" (Mark 1:41)
- "When he stepped ashore and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Mark 14:14)
- "Then Jesus called his disciples and said, 'I have compassion on the crowd, because they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may faint along the way'" (Matthew 15:32)
- "Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes, and at once they could see". (Matthew 20:34)

What exactly is “compassion”? Is it the same as sympathy, mercy, kindness, pity? Is it an emotion, an action, both?

Some secular definitions of compassion:

- “sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it” (Merriam Webster Dictionary)
- “a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them” (Cambridge Dictionary)
- “the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering...compassion literally means ‘to suffer together’ ” (from Greater Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life; University of California at Berkely)

“Slow to anger” – Most Old Testament statements about compassion couple it with being “slow to anger”.

- What does this mean? Must we be “slow to anger” to be able to be compassionate?
- Is it even possible to be slow to anger?
- Can we be filled with compassion when we are angry?
- What does this mean for us today, in this incredibly anger-filled time in our country, in our world, and, for some of us, in our own lives?

What does it mean to say that compassion is a virtue of a beloved community? Do we have compassion? What keeps us from behaving with compassion? How can we do better?