

DEC 22, 2024

# *Marion* weekly update

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*December 15 sermon— “Hope in Compassion”*

*Matthew 9:35-38, Luke 7:12-23*

This week our hope is in the hope of compassion. Compassion should be a required trait for every person who claims to be a follower of Christ. Our faith demands it.

When we talk about compassion we're not simply saying “I feel sorry for such and such or so and so”. That's a fleeting emotion. Compassion is a heartfelt sense of seeing another person's pain, need, brokenness, etc., and having a genuine longing to bring relief to their circumstance. Then, when we are able, to act upon it.

Of course every need we come across we can't meet. None of us have the time, resources, or energy to do so. Still, when and where we can acting on the compassion in our hearts is a necessity. It may be giving food, shelter, clothing, time, love, understanding and so many other things. Whatever it is we are trying to help someone get to the next moment, the next day, the next conversation, the next meal, whatever it is they need.

Jesus is the epitome of exemplifying compassion. This to the place it's recorded several times “and He was moved with compassion for them, him, her.” Even if it isn't expressly stated, His actions and words scream compassion. He saw people where they were, and are, at and in His power and wisdom did something about it.

Blind, leprous, lame He saw them and healed them. His compassion for the sick was so great that when the woman with the “issue of blood” simply touched Him she was healed. When thousands were hungry on a hillside he kept them close and fed them. The desire to show mercy on people was that intense. When Lazarus died His compassion reached out as He wept with the sisters, and came to fruition as He raised Lazarus from the dead. At the well the Samaritan woman who is largely understood to have been on the fringe of her community received the compassion of companionship and conversation, and the gift of Jesus sharing His identity with her. The woman caught in adultery was seen in her fear and shame. Jesus' compassion took her to her side to spare her life from her accusers. When Jesus saw the need for humanity to be reconciled to God, His compassion compelled Him to the greatest sacrifice to secure that redemption.

Notice as well what Jesus' compassion did. It stretched across Jew and Gentile, people of standing and no standing. Innocence wasn't a requirement. The woman caught in adultery was clearly guilty. Being socially accepted wasn't a qualification, as we've said the Samaritan woman seemed on the outs with her community. Numbers didn't matter when 5000 plus needed fed.

The need was all that it took to drum up amazing, incredible compassion. And true compassion compels action.

One of the good litmus tests regarding where the compassion in our hearts lie is in how we speak about people in need. How we speak about people who have for some reason been pushed to the outside or looked down upon. I learned this the hard way in my younger years.

I was pretty sheltered growing up. I held some very harsh and judgmental attitudes towards quite a few different groups of people. These views were based in stereotypes, hearsay, and assumption. People were lazy, stupid, depraved, had no decency. Lots of different descriptors for folks who were different than me in any one of a number of ways, you can probably guess a few of them.

Then life intervened and all these people for whom I had no compassion began to be seen in a different light...because I met them. Lots of them. All these different judgments I had blew apart because I began to understand that people are where they are for a reason. Many times the reasons are abuses, unfairness, injustices, and circumstances I could scarcely conceive before much less relate to.

That judgment and callousness turned to compassion.

People I worked with that had been convicted of various crimes, some pretty nasty, were no longer faceless criminals. They had stories that led them to what they had done. I think I can say with close

to 100% accuracy that while I can't condone what they had done, I had compassion for what drove them there. I learned that consequences and compassion can go hand in hand. Sometimes people need consequence. Sometimes they need removed from the general population not just for consequence but for treatment to prevent what had happened from happening again.

What they didn't need was written off, harshly judged, or ignored.

I learned something that I believe is God ordained, and reflected in the witness of Christ. My heart does a whole lot better when I stop making excuses for why someone "deserves" their lot in life and instead open up to understanding them and finding the compassion to love them anyway and where I can do something to help.

In all of this is hope. Hope for individuals and hope for the world.

Everywhere around us are people who are in some form of need or brokenness. They are down and maybe almost out. What they are longing for is someone to reach out and offer help for their situation. Their hope is that the world around them will find compassion for their need and bring some kind of relief. The compassion that Christ reveals and is called to live inside of each of us is their hope. When we live into it that hope is realized and a life, lives, even a world made the better for it. This is also the hope of everyone who is not in urgent need or dire straights. The hope of salvation doesn't lie merely in some polished statement of faith. Faith means we follow Jesus. We imitate Him and continue the work He began in His life in ministry. If compassion is a hallmark of that, then it must be for us as well. Our hope in redemption is marked and evidenced by the compassion that we have for one another, especially those in the greatest hurt and need. Compassion is the hope for a heart peaceful and secure in salvation, and that our lives are being used as best as possible by God.

I would suggest that as we approach Christmas, we let the Christmas story inspire us to compassion. In compassion Joseph called off the divorce and stayed with Mary. In compassion Mary and Joseph were offered all that the innkeeper had, even if it was just a stable. In compassion and obedience the Magi avoided Herod as they returned to spare the Christ child. Ultimately an act of compassion for his wife and child, Joseph made the call to flee to Egypt to protect them.

And perhaps the greatest compassion of all, God sent Jesus to be born among and walk with us so that one day His compassion would rest on a redeeming cross.

### BIBLE STUDY—2 Samuel 3

After the somewhat strange battling described in chapter 2, in chapter 3 the war continues over who is rightful king over all Israel. Even after Saul's death, Saul's household continues to fight against David. Just as Saul got weaker over time, so does his household while David's continues to grow in strength.

There is a not too subtle hint that David is going to win this one out. We get a list of David's sons and wives(their mothers). A simple reason for this is to begin communicating a line of succession for the next true king.

In Saul's household there is trouble brewing. Ishbaal is king, but not the true power behind that throne. Abner is the strength and the wisdom. He was a commander for Saul, and here a significant advisor for Ishbaal.

We see Ishbaal very much afraid of Abner. One of the suggestions is that the age of 40 given for Ishbaal is likely overstated. If Ishbaal were not old enough to go to battle and die with Saul's other sons he certainly would have been much younger. He may not even have been marrying age as we'll see in a moment. Regardless, his inexperience and youth requires advising. To be that young in the presence of an experienced warrior and trusted aid to his father would have to be intimidating.

In his suspicion he accuses Abner of sleeping with one of his father's concubines. To do this would have potentially been seen as a sign that Abner himself was seeking to take the throne for himself. That this was a custom is reflected later on when Absalom is working to overthrow his father David. How will the people know he has claimed the throne once David is ousted from the palace? He is told to go to the rooftop with all of David's concubines and sleep with them in public view. This would

be a sign to Israel that Absalom was now king. Whether or not Abner did we do not know. What we do know is that Abner took great offense to the accusation. "After all I've done for your father and for you how could you say such a thing?!"

It's understood now that David's reputation for becoming future king has spread. At least Abner is aware of it. Perhaps many more know or perhaps Abner was just paying attention when Saul proclaimed as much the two times David spared Saul's life. Regardless, Abner now threatens to ensure that all of Israel is turned over to David's rule.

Now Abner is making a play with David. David is no fool. He secures that Abner is being genuine by asking for his old wife Michal to be returned (remember that Saul had taken Michal and married her off to another man to keep David from having any kin ties to him). This is a very political move. There's no sense that love and/or missing her has anything to do with it. David is simply re-securing another tie to the throne by marrying into the family of the king.

Michal's poor husband is a sign of this. David's request is cold. Her husband is distraught at losing his wife. As he follows her Abner coolly tells him to back off. She has no say. Her husband has no say. It almost feels like Ishbaal has no say (Michal would be his sister). David sends for Michal to Ishbaal. There is no record here that Abner was an intermediary, though he may have been. The way it reads it simply says that David requested her from Ishbaal and Ishbaal conceded. Was this Abner's doing? Is this Ishbaal reacting in fear of David without an real savvy due to his youth?

When Abner finally gets to meet David the interaction is pleasant. David makes a feast for Abner and his men. They talk. Abner has already sent word to all Israel offering to make David their king. With David's blessing Abner leaves to go and "rally all Israel" to make covenant with David.

In this is a great lesson. Even enemies can be cordial and civil to one another. Even once enemies can become allies eventually if the circumstances are right. These two men commanded armies that fought hard against one another for the prize of kingship. Abner has, for whatever reason, come to see David as the true ruler. The tension is dropped and now they have come together in a covenant together united in who should win the prize for which they were fighting.

Enemies don't have to remain enemies. Would that more folks understood this.

When Joab here's Abner has been there he is upset and warns David that Abner is deceitful. Unbeknownst to David Joab brings Abner back and kills him. This has nothing to do with protecting David. It is a revenge killing for Asahel's death.

Important to note here is that the death of Asahel and the death of Abner are not the same. Asahel died in battle. Not only that but he died because he failed to heed the warnings of Abner who tried to persuade him away so he wouldn't have to kill him. On the other hand Abner hadn't done anything to genuinely earn this revenge killing. Joab is guilty of the bloodguilt David has tried to avoid time and again.

Just as with the death of Saul, David makes a great show of Abner's lament and funeral so it is evident he had no hand in Abner's death. Abner has been hard at work trying to unify the kingship of Israel under David. To be associated with his murder would be a terrible risk to the plans set in motion.

David also pronounces a terrible curse over the house of Joab. He is clearly furious.

As Abner is mourned we already begin to see some frustration in David's leadership. He calls himself "powerless". Joab and his kin are "too violent" for him. There is a sense here that even if David wanted to punish Joab, he felt that he couldn't. It may have been that Joab had too much sway in the military. Perhaps Joab's family was too influential at the time. Whatever the reason, being king doesn't mean always getting one's own way. Sometimes even the king bows to political or public pressure. Joab continues on in service to David.

For my own personal take away in this chapter there is something that stands out. Israel unites under David, and we often give David credit for this. I disagree. It is Abner's power and influence that unites Israel under Ishbaal. It is Abner how send word to Israel then to come together with Judah under David. David is the recipient of Abner's hard work. In the end, though part of Saul's contingent, Abner shows himself to be of some honor. He doesn't want to unnecessarily kill Asahel. Perhaps he

recognizes Ishbaal for a weak king who didn't deserve the throne after all. And he goes about the business of making David ruler over all Israel, which was God's intention all along. Abner isn't just a military figure, in this case he is an instrument of God's design.