

Receiving Hope from our Good Samaritan

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Once there was a banquet that was given in honor of those who had supported a local food bank. The speaker that evening was an older gentleman who had once been helped but was doing much better. At the time when he received help, he was homeless and was looking for employment. But doing much better now, being fully employed and having a home of his own, he was invited to share some of his thoughts that night. Here's some of what he shared: *"The poor have always been a part of our society. But in my opinion, poverty is the heartbeat of our society. And we really don't have a problem with the lack of food in this country. While it's true that there are people working full time that make use of food banks and soup kitchens to feed themselves and their families, food is in great abundance. Even the poorest person can get a meal without going to jail, but each of us is more than that. We're more than just flesh and blood. We all have a spirit that beats within us, and it cries out for the nurturing milk of compassion. That we might grow and prosper according to God's plan. And while many believe that they've done their part by providing food, we really need to feed the human spirit by providing meaningful opportunities to those who seek a productive, meaningful life. So that they might better themselves and their families as well as their community."*

Months later someone asked him how his words were received. The man said that while he was grateful for the

services he once received, he had wanted to challenge those who were there, that they might consider what else might be done in their compassionate offering to those in need. So that more people might have hope in their lives. But when the banquet was over, many simply thanked him and went on their way.

In today's Gospel reading, we heard the story of the Good Samaritan. A man who was making his way from Jerusalem to Jericho is robbed, beaten, and left half-dead. Both a priest and a Levite ignore him, but a Samaritan sees him and was moved with compassion to tend to his wounds. And He took him to an inn where he might be better cared for. The word for compassion here comes from the Greek word, "Splagchinizomai" or a gut reaction that MOVED the Samaritan to do something when He saw the man lying there on the side of the road. It was more than pity. Because pity is a sympathetic sorry for one who is suffering, distressed, or unhappy. No one likes to be pitied because it can feel insulting and humiliating when others see you as somehow inferior. But then again, pity can lead to compassion. That sympathetic feeling of sorrow WITH the desire to alleviate the suffering, distress, or unhappiness of another. While pity is an emotion, compassion is both an emotion and a virtue.

The Good Samaritan saw the suffering and helplessness of the man and his heart went out to him. Even though he knew that stopping to help the man could mean that he himself might be attacked, focusing on the man, he relieved the man's suffering and provided first aid by pouring oil and wine on the man's wounds. He bound the man's wounds and brought him to an inn. But instead of dropping him off and continuing on his journey, the Good Samaritan took the time to care for the man until he HAD to go. But before he left, he paid the innkeeper to look after the man while he was away

and promised to come back and repay the innkeeper
WHATEVER more he spent on the man's care.

We show compassion when, without judgment, we try to understand what someone is going through. We listen to them and help them to understand that they're not alone. And we help to ease their pain and suffering. Now, while some might see that as giving them hope. Hope truly is trusting in the future that is not seen. It's the anticipation of and desire for something to happen EVEN WHEN overwhelming evidence indicates that it won't turn out well. You see, the people who are most hopeful are those with the greatest probability that things won't go well in the future. And yet, they still look forward and anticipate a better outcome.

When our Lord Jesus walked this earth, for much of His ministry He spent time with those who were outcasts. The poor, the sick, the lame, the widowed, and the homeless who didn't have much of a voice in society. He listened to them, and because of His compassion for them, they truly heard the Gospel – the Good News of God. The message was for them and for each of us who've been wounded by sin and have been left half-dead.

Jesus is our Good Samaritan who comes and binds up our wounds and carries us to safety and pays the price for us. Willingly giving His life for us on the cross so that we might once again freely love God as well as our neighbor with all our heart, mind, and soul, and live in the hope of a new and certain future, which He set out for us. And we look forward to His return.

Now that older gentleman who was once homeless who had been asked to speak was certainly moved by the care that he received from the local food bank, but his audience had

expected him to share words of compassion about how good and neighborly they had been and how neighborly they should feel about giving to their neighbors in need. But what they heard were challenging words of hope. Hope is often hard to understand and hear because it requires us to change how we perceive things so that a better future might come about.

It's wonderful that our church even today continues its work of providing for others and helping to make a difference in their lives. Through our social ministries and mission committees, we support the Loudoun Homeless Shelter and Loudoun Hunger Relief. We redistribute food from various restaurants like Panera to various locations. We help to provide housing to those seeking medical attention in Kenya. We support an orphanage in Haiti. We help those who are underprivileged in our local and surrounding communities. And through our GriefShare, Comfort Dog, and Stephen Ministries, we're able to show care for those in need.

This morning I'd like for you to consider what we might do to reach more people. As you know, we had a volunteer fair not too long ago. Get more involved in the life of our church by volunteering to be part of one or more of these ministries. If you don't know who to contact, simply contact the church office, so that you can be connected to the right person. Compassionately care for your neighbors. Listen to their needs. And while we might not be able to meet all of them, their ideas and thoughts might help us to reach out to more people. And in turn, we might have more opportunities to share the eternal hope that is ours through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.