



Monday, March 20, 2023

Compassion and Mercy

Scott Stoner

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.*

—Psalm 51:1 (NIV)

Mercy is a word that is found repeatedly in the Bible. Sometimes it appears when a person is asking for God to have mercy on them. Other times it appears when talking about how God or Jesus shows mercy on those who are suffering in some way. Some passages exhort believers to show mercy to others.

This week's reflections will focus on the relationship between compassion and mercy. We learned previously that one definition of compassion is "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it." One initial way to think about mercy is that it is the way we put our desire to alleviate another person's suffering into action. An act of mercy is an expression of compassion.

Mercy can be expressed in several ways, including visiting people who are sick or imprisoned, feeding those who are hungry, providing clothing and housing for people in need, forgiving, offering comfort to those who are afflicted, and praying for others.

In yesterday's reflection, Chris Yaw, with the help of author Henri Nouwen, reminded us that "compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human." This week we will explore how mercy calls us more deeply into that "full immersion."

Making it Personal: What initial thoughts do you have about the relationship between compassion and mercy? Can you think of a time when someone showed mercy to you? How about a time when you showed mercy to someone else? How did it feel?

Tuesday, March 21, 2023

Mercy and Forgiveness

Scott Stoner

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

—Luke 6:36-37

One characteristic of mercy is that it is the free offering of compassion to another by someone who has the freedom to choose whether to give or withhold that offering. And so we see in the passage above that forgiveness is included as an expression of mercy.

Extending forgiveness to someone who has hurt us is an expression of mercy because our decision to offer forgiveness is a choice we are free to make. When we extend forgiveness, we act in a way that shows mercy to the person who has caused the hurt.

I remember many years ago when I chose to offer forgiveness to someone who had hurt me. I discovered that not only was I offering a gift of mercy to the other person, but it also turned out to be a gift for me. I felt lighter and freer as I let go of my hurt and resentment.

The mercy of God is both our source and our model for being merciful. This is why Jesus said, “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.” We are the recipients of God’s mercy, and then, in turn, we are called to be the ones who extend that mercy to others. Just as we are offered the gift of forgiveness from God, we also seek to provide that gift of forgiveness to others.

Making it Personal: What do you think of the idea that forgiveness is an act of mercy? Is there someone in your life to whom you would like to extend the mercy of forgiveness? What benefits do you see for others *and* for yourself when you choose to extend compassion and mercy?



Wednesday, March 22, 2023

The Heart of the Heart of God

Robbin Brent

*Can a woman forget her nursing-child, or show
no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.*

—Isaiah 49:15

Mercy is where we encounter the fullness of the heart of God. The Greek and Hebrew root words for mercy translated include steadfast love, goodness, forgiveness, strength, lovingkindness, healing care and love, and innermost depth (womb).

Our Lady of the Sign and *Mary of the Cosmos* are two icons that depict Mary with an infant or a globe in her womb. These images reveal a God who has created us and loves us as a mother or father loves their beloved infant from the core of their being. This awareness has expanded my understanding of God as One who profoundly loves and cares for each and every one of us as beloved children, offering mercy through life-giving nourishment, care, love, and protection from the center of the center of God's own heart.

When we respond compassionately toward ourselves and others, *with all our heart*, from the innermost depth or core of our being, the compassion and mercy we offer are medicine for our minds, our hearts, our bodies, and our souls. They heal and transform because through them we experience God's ever-present love and care for us. God's mercy always pours forth from God's healing love because both come from the same source, the heart of the heart of God.

I find great comfort in knowing that whenever I can practice compassion and mercy, toward myself or another, I am serving as a bridge for God's healing love.

Making it Personal: What do you think of the idea of God loving us from the deepest part of God, as deeply as a mother or father loves an infant growing in the womb? Have you ever experienced healing or reconciliation through an act of lovingkindness? If yes, what was that like?

Thursday, March 23, 2023

Acts of Mercy

Scott Stoner

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you
say you have faith but do not have works?*

—James 2:14

For many centuries the Church has taught the importance of what are known as the Seven Acts of Mercy, which are to: give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the prisoners, and to bury the dead. The first six of these come from Matthew 25, where Jesus says, “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Matt. 25:35-36). The Church later added the seventh act, to bury the dead, which included providing a proper burial for all people, as well as caring for those who are grieving.

The importance of the Acts of Mercy can also be seen in the passage above from James. To paraphrase, one could say, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, to say you have compassion but do not express your compassion through acts of mercy?”

As a person of faith, I see the Acts of Mercy as an invitation and a reminder to put my faith into action. When I am conscious of these acts and pray to be open to seeing a specific way I might express one of these acts, I always encounter an opportunity to do so. I invite you to bring these Acts of Mercy into your prayers and see what opportunities open up for you to express compassion to others.

Making it Personal: Is there a particular act of the Seven Acts of Mercy that you feel called to offer to someone in your life? Are there others acts of mercy that you would add to this list? If so, what are they?



Friday, March 24, 2023

Willing to Wait

Robbin Brent

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

“Patient” is not an attribute my family and close friends would choose to describe me. It might not even make it into the top ten. Yet, as the above quote tells us, patient trust is what will allow us to better see how God’s work in the world is unfolding, and how God is asking us to more fully participate in God’s dreams for the world made manifest through us.

Patience and compassion are closely related at their root and can mean to suffer, to endure, to experience, or to wait. They also are defined as God’s passion, as God’s great love and hope for the world. So if patience, compassion, mercy, and God’s love are interwoven, how do we get better at being patient, of trusting more fully in God’s timing? In yesterday’s reflection, Scott Stoner shared the Seven Acts of Mercy as important ways of living compassionately through what we do. He invited us to a practice of prayerfully seeking God’s guidance for how we might offer one of those acts of mercy to someone in our lives. This is a wonderful way to practice putting our trust more fully in God’s timing.

If we can be patient with ourselves as we learn to be more fully present with another in their suffering, and to respond out of a desire to help in some way, we are better able to call upon the gifts, or fruits, of compassion: kindness, mercy, empathy, goodness, and forgiveness. Patience and trust will also strengthen our ability to notice when God is asking us to be the arms of love and mercy in the world. We get better at trusting God’s timing more than our own.

Making it Personal: What do you think about the connection between having patience and trust and being better able to respond with compassion and mercy to the needs of the world, others, and ourselves? What is one practice that might help you to be more patient? Do you have a quote, poem, or prayer that might inspire your desire to trust more deeply in the way God is working through you in the world?

Saturday, March 25, 2023

Being There Matters

Jan Kwiatkowski

*At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful
Mother weeping, close to Jesus to the last.*

—from the hymn *At the Cross Her Station Keeping*, written by Jacopone da Todi;
translation by Edward Caswall

On Thursday, Scott Stoner explored the Seven Acts of Mercy and how they offer specific ways we can offer compassion and mercy to those who are suffering in ways visible, tangible, and obvious. As a therapist and pastor, in addition to the visible suffering of others, I also encounter the not-so-obvious pain of anxiety, fear, loss, depression, hopelessness, and loneliness.

Our society values being anything but vulnerable. Admitting our own need for mercy and compassion and recognizing countless quiet cries for mercy and compassion around us are counter-cultural and yet what our world so desperately needs. Compounding this issue, those silenced and often-shamed people suffering from anxiety, fear, loss, depression, hopelessness, and loneliness often hide in ways that make it hard for others to respond to with compassion and mercy. In these situations, it is important to remember that even when we don't see a way of responding concretely to the needs of those quietly suffering, the gift of being present is enough.

Just a few stood at the foot of the cross, not able to do anything other than be there. Standing at the foot of the cross and holding each other and the dying Lord of Life in compassionate mercy and presence is an example beyond words of the value of our presence and compassion.

Making it Personal: Describe a time when the only thing you could do was to be present and what that was like for you. Has there been a time when someone was there for you during a dark time in your life? What was that like for you? If there is someone in your life who might be open to the mercy of compassionate presence, what might be a simple way you could be present for them?

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 26, 2023

Embracing Belovedness

Martha Bourlakas

Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

—John 11:40

I have heard *The Word is very near you* for most of my adult life, but I wasn't getting it. I knew I *should* understand that the infinite love of God and the Universe is not reserved for me only after everyone else has received theirs. I *should* be able to integrate this Word into my heart and life, living into God's intimacy with me. My relationship with God and myself changed when I realized the *shoulds* were part of the problem. Instead of where I should be, here I am. When I receive God's love and compassion for my Self first, as I am, I acknowledge the power of the Holy Spirit moving and acting within me.

My realization began with the word *selfish*, a word our religious systems, our culture, our families have long taught us—especially women—is the worst possible word. Isn't it selfish of me to address the love and care I need, before considering others? After all, I am a Mom, a wife, a daughter, a friend. If I don't put all the love and attention towards everyone else first, I am not following the Christian teachings of self-sacrifice I have always learned. The Holy Spirit within me was not settled on this idea, and she got blow-y, began stirring up things within me. I picked up my pen and started writing.

For two years, every single day, I wrote in my journal, *I am a beloved child of God*. This was my way of praying, understanding, believing it is not selfish of me to put myself first in receiving God's love and care. I need and deserve this wondrous, expansive love, here and now. God's abundant love is always available, not meted out after we have done all the *right* things. The words are teaching me that the best way for me to navigate marriage, parenting, friendships, work—all of it—is to turn

