

Having spent time studying at Church Army College, you would expect me to use today's gospel passage to preach about mission, and believe me I have done, many times, and probably will do again. But in looking at this passage this week, there were two things that struck me; the first was the word compassion, which seemed to jump out at me, the other was healing as part of the Gospel message.

The passage tells us that Jesus had compassion for the crowds. The Greek word used for compassion is a very strong word and it's formed from a word that means bowels. It describes a feeling from deep inside, from the very depths of our being. Apart from a couple of references in the parables (where Jesus explains what God is like) this word is only ever used of Jesus. It seems to imply that Jesus had a greater capacity for genuine concern, care, empathy and heart-rending love than anyone. Of course, this rings especially true of someone who was willing to sacrifice His own life to save others.

But what prompted these deep feelings in Jesus? A quick glance through the gospels will give us many answers to that one question, but in this passage, He was moved by the helplessness of the people. The literal translation of the word that we have as helpless is actually, "laid prostrate", and it was used of people who were mortally wounded. People for whom there was little hope. The kind of people of whom you would say, "only a miracle could save them now". Spiritually speaking, the miracle of the resurrection is what saves all who believe in Jesus. But today's gospel passage shows that Jesus is not only concerned about spiritual healing, He longs for people to know physical healing too. He clearly sees healing as part of the gospel message because when He sends out the twelve, he gives them authority to heal. He sent them out to do what He had been doing. Our first verse today says that Jesus had been preaching, teaching and curing every disease and every sickness. Lord how we need that today!

As Christians, that is, modern day disciples, we are to do our best to be like Jesus. We may not feel that we have been given authority over every kind of disease and sickness, but we **should** have compassion for those who suffer, both spiritually and physically. We should try to enter into their pain. If we develop a real sense of compassion, we will be compelled to pray. We will pray earnestly to our Father. We are in the midst of a pandemic, there may be a relaxation of some of the rules but it is by no means over. I heard just minutes ago, from someone who lives there, that Beijing is experiencing a second outbreak. I am thankful that no one in our family has succumbed to this dreadful virus, but every day, Dave and I pray for healing. No doubt, many already do but please can I urge you to have heart felt compassion on those who suffer and appeal to the compassion of Jesus, asking Him to send healing, be that through direct divine intervention, bestowing authority on his disciples, giving knowledge to scientists and all the medical profession or by any other means He sees fit. Jesus had compassion on the helpless in this passage; we are helpless Lord, show us your compassion. Amen.