

March 4, 2018 Journeys with Jesus: Jesus in the Decapolis

Compassion

One of the hallmarks of Jesus' earthly ministry, compassion is a heartfelt concern for the situation of others. It motivates us to do whatever we can to help someone who is hurting, suffering, being persecuted, or just having a tough time. In the 6th chapter of Mark, Jesus is visiting with the disciples and hearing reports of all the good ministry they've been doing, but the crowds keep pressing in on them so much, that Jesus invites the disciples to come away with him to a quiet place so they can rest and eat and relax. But the crowds follow. Verses 33-34: ***But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things...***

Even though Jesus was very tired, he had compassion on those who were so hungry for the truth about God, that he put off resting, and spoke to them the message of truth and love. Jesus troubled himself, on behalf of others. And not just one time, or a few times, but all the time. This way of compassion and consideration for others was his modus operandi. Jesus had compassion on the woman caught in adultery (John 8), parents whose children were ill, a Centurion with a sick servant (Luke 7), a woman with a flow of blood (Mark 5), and even hanging on a cross, Jesus troubled himself to respond with grace to the criminal hanging next to him (Luke 23). Jesus always responded to others with compassion. We should take our cue from Jesus, and do likewise.

Of course, sometimes, we like to think we are earning "extra credit" with our good deeds. Ruth Harms Calkin touches a sensitive spot in all of us when she writes:

*You know, Lord, how I serve You
with great emotional fervor
in the limelight.
You know how eagerly I speak for You
At a women's club.
You know how I effervesce
when I promote a fellowship group.
You know my genuine enthusiasm
at a Bible study.*

*But how would I react, I wonder
if You pointed to a basin of water
and asked me to wash
the calloused feet
of a bent and wrinkled old woman
day after day,
month after month,
In a room where nobody saw
and nobody knew....*

Ouch! Indeed, we often like to help others in ways that gain us favor or build our reputation as a doer of good deeds. But living a life of compassion involves a willingness to spend oneself in humility on behalf of others, often in a context of obscurity. You may get noticed and thanked; you may not. Do it anyway. Be a person who regularly says to God, “here I am, send me.”

The Decapolis

The Decapolis mentioned in today’s scripture, referred to a federation of ten cities of Hellenistic culture in an area east of Samaria and Galilee. The Roman scholar Pliny the Elder (ca. A.D. 77) lists them as follows: Damascus, Philadelphia, Raphana, Scythopolis, Gadara, Hippos, Dion, Pella, Gerasa, and Canatha. Unlike many of the Jews of his time, Jesus felt comfortable traveling through the cities of the Decapolis, teaching and healing, and he even healed a man possessed by a Legion of demons near the village of the Gerasenes....

