

Sermon Series on Creation Spirituality
Week 2: “Spirit of Compassion”

Message by DD Adams
Providence Kemptown U.M. Church
July 29, 2018

The New Testament lesson is from Mark’s gospel, chapter 12, verses 28 through 34. One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”

Jesus replied, “The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.”

The legal expert said to him, “Well said, Teacher. You have truthfully said that God is one and there is no other besides God. And to love God with all of the heart, a full understanding, and all of one’s strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself is much more important than all kinds of entirely burned offerings and sacrifices.”

When Jesus saw that he had answered with wisdom, he said to him, “You aren’t far from God’s kingdom.” After that, no one dared to ask him any more questions. This is God’s word for the people of God. Lord we pray your blessing on the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word today. Amen.

Last Sunday five month old Cole Joseph Dodson was baptized and his older brother Zachary graduated from confirmation class. We did a lot of celebrating. Cole, with the guidance of his parents, took advantage of baptism as a means of grace, and he was initiated into Christ's church. He now has a new identity, and God claims him as his own. And Zachary Dodson, through confirmation has now affirmed his baptismal vows and made his first public profession of faith in Christ.

Today we celebrate Savannah Beale graduating from confirmation class. Just watching her joy and enthusiasm in class was a sign to me that showed me how Savannah views the world. In other words, it's exciting! Savannah sees and experiences the goodness of God in her life, and I believe she does all the good she can to spread God's goodness.

As we affirmed last Sunday, God is good! **All the time!** And all the time! **God is good!** When we affirm to ourselves and to others the goodness of God—as part of God's creation—we become more of what that goodness is!

The most effective way to spread God's goodness is by showing compassion, but we hear by many in the world a more cynical view. Some would say "that's just the way it is." But God takes another route as we walk along with Him on a divine master plan that will one day change the world as we know it.

Last week we talked about becoming fully alive and fully active to respond to the world around us. When we recognize and remind ourselves that our identity

is with Christ, our aim is to spread the goodness of God as we identify with the suffering and pain of others. But how do we express the compassion of Christ in our lives? Showing compassion surely isn't a way to pacify guilt, *but through prayer*, compassion becomes a virtue within us that's expressed outwardly to others in need.

Compassion means "to suffer with" and it's so much more than just being kind. Henri Nouwen defines compassion as this. "Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human."

So now you're asking yourself, "Preacher, what does compassion have to do with loving God and neighbor?" Well I'm glad you asked. Mark 12:29-31 tells us that the greatest and most important commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself."

When we love God we're then able to love others. There's a vertical and a horizontal element. We're unable to do one effectively without doing the other. Love involves doing both— which is what Jesus showed us while he was a man

fulfilling his ministry on earth. The greatest commandment shows us in a nutshell what to do and how to do it. To love God and then go and show the compassion of Christ to the world. The only way is to ask God in prayer for his help to accomplish it.

But prayer is followed by action that shows compassion and love; it's never left alone without expressing itself. This is spreading the goodness of God and being fully present and active in the world. This is our mission as Christian disciples. Please, let's join together and recite the Lord's Prayer—asking for this very thing.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.