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St. Luke's Episcopal Church ~ Anchorage, Kentucky
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost ~ Year C August 13 & 14, 2016
Luke 5:4-11 & I Corinthians 12:4-11

Florence Nightingale was devoted to showing compassion to others. Her calling enabled her to mercifully live out the spiritual gifts that God had bestowed upon her, and in doing so, she not only helped save hundreds of lives, but she also offered hope to the suffering.

We too are called to be a people of compassion, and Jesus teaches this throughout the Gospels. In Mark 6:34 it is recorded "When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things." Matthew 14:14 reads "When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick." John's gospel account encompasses mercy and compassion as Jesus proclaims the great commandment in (John 13:34-35) "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Moreover, Paul echoes these teachings in several of his letters – one being his letter to the Galatians 6:2 as he writes "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Similarly in his letter to the Romans 12:15 Paul writes "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." Furthermore, in today's gospel Jesus displays compassion toward Simon Peter and the other fishermen, as they had fished all night and caught nothing. Yet, Jesus' showed compassion for them and as a result, the fishermen were able to catch more fish than their nets could hold.

When Jesus teaches us to love our neighbor he is teaching us to show compassion to anyone who is in need. In fact, one of the central characteristics of Jesus' and His people is that they offer compassion to others. What moves you to compassion? Interestingly enough, it can often be most difficult for us to have compassion for ourselves. This is not a selfish act, but a necessary act in order for us to live more fully.

When we have compassion for others we are moved to the core for the sake of another. In fact, the word compassion hails from the Greek word *splagchnizomai* which means 'to be moved in the inward parts.' Showing compassion toward others is to be moved to action and this has always been the key feature of the ministry of Jesus - to move into action by helping others.

Compassion is synonymous with empathy. Empathy fuels connection, and it is important and helpful for caregivers and folks who are in helping professions to understand the connection between the two. Teresa Wiseman (a nursing scholar) conducted research studying diverse professions where empathy was relevant. In her findings she discovered four key characteristics of empathy: 1) perspective taking, the ability to take on the perspective of another person 2) staying out of judgement 3) recognizing emotion in other people and communicating that with them, and 4) simply feeling with people (often referred to as the ministry of presence). Empathy and compassion are not to be mistaken with sympathy, as sympathy is feeling pity or sorrow for the distress of another person – and certainly there is an appropriate time for sympathy. Yet, empathy is a choice, that one makes in an effort to connect with another person, which to do rightly requires one to be vulnerable. In order for us to truly empathize with and have compassion for others, we must first connect with something within ourselves (which requires us to be vulnerable) that knows, at least to a certain degree, what another person may be feeling.

When we encounter difficult situations, we have an innate desire to want to make things better, but the fact is that there is most often rarely anything that we can say that will make things better for the person in need. However, simple human connection is often the most powerful healer. In order to truly connect, we must allow ourselves to be vulnerable. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and in order to do this we must allow ourselves to be fully human, as this is the only way that we can form this intimate connection with others.

Each one of us has been endowed with enumerable gifts from God, as Paul mentions in his letter to the people of Corinth. We are many members but one body, and we are more alike than we are different from one another. Permit me to share with you a timely, beautiful poem from a commercial sponsored by '*Apple*', which is narrated by Maya Angelo and is entitled 'The Human Family.'

I note the obvious differences
in the human family.
Some of us are serious,
some thrive on comedy.

Some declare their lives are lived
as true profundity,
and others claim they really live
the real reality.

The variety of our skin tones
can confuse, bemuse, delight,
brown and pink and beige and purple,
tan and blue and white.

I've sailed upon the seven seas
and stopped in every land,
I've seen the wonders of the world
not yet one common man.

I know ten thousand women
called Jane and Mary Jane,
but I've not seen any two
who really were the same.

Mirror twins are different
although their features jibe,
and lovers think quite different thoughts
while lying side by side.

We love and lose in China,
we weep on England's moors,
and laugh and moan in Guinea,
and thrive on Spanish shores.

We seek success in Finland,
are born and die in Maine.
In minor ways we differ,
in major we're the same.

I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type,
but we are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

Each of us has unique gifts and we all have something to contribute to humankind for the betterment of our families, our community, and our world. Florence Nightingale saw more similarity among the human beings that she served so generously than she saw differences. She saw the sufferings of humankind and utilized her gifts of healing and compassion to serve others and to serve Christ Jesus.

No question that serving others can often prove to be challenging and exhausting at times. But when we keep our focus on God through prayer and contemplation, as Florence did, he will grant us the fortitude and strength that we need to have compassion for humankind. God can do things through us that are greater than we could ever ask or imagine, and His love is the only true healer. Amen.

