

FAITH & GENEROSITY REFLECTION

R o m a n s 5 : 1 – 8 ; M a t t h e w 9 : 3 5 – 1 0 : 8

B Y T H E R E V E R E N D F A I T H B A I L E Y

God's generosity
Shown supremely in Jesus

This is the message of Jesus, the message of the Gospels: that God himself, the Word
'became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish (John 1:14).'

His glory was not in his high and mighty power, but in his interactions with the poor, his
alleviation of suffering, his reversing of the effects of sin and death, and his ushering in of
the upside-down kingdom where the last will be first and where he seeks out and saves the
lost (Luke 19:10).

The Harvest is Plentiful

The Gospel reading talks about an active and compassionate Jesus, one fulfilling his
self-proclaimed mission in Luke 4.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"

He went to where the people were – took time to come near to them, even though, as we see in other passages, people would willingly travel to see him.

The Need for Compassion

Jesus was moved with compassion for so many people, but He saw beyond the obvious. For us, it is so easy to recognise and respond to an obvious need.

I was struck by this at our FareShare pantry the other week, where the helpers, including myself, had made a judgment about who was most needy because of the way people looked, the way they behaved, or where they lived. We ended up giving them preferential treatment. It took the other users to say, “We all come here for our own reasons – they may not be obvious, but they are real to us.”

Jesus saw through the prejudices and beyond the ‘easy to spot’ poor. The quote from Luke 19 above is at the end of the account of Zacchaeus, the tax collector. Straight out of university, I applied for a job to be a tax inspector, and in the initial round of interviews, somebody asked if tax collectors had issues with friendships and being rejected. The answer was that this didn’t happen if they mixed with the right kind of people. We see, all through the Gospels, Jesus mixing with the wrong kind of people, a man who had wealth and status, but who was also an outcast.

Compassion due to lack of leadership

Jesus didn’t just bring physical healing – his compassion was sparked most acutely by the lack of leadership: “he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Jesus responds to the needs of the people by embodying a leadership that is deeply relational, restorative, and motivated by compassion. By empowering others to be coworkers with him.

In the list of disciples here we see such a variety of characters. Just look at the makeup of the twelve: the “first” apostle Peter will deny the Lord three times and the last apostle Judas will betray him to death, while two apostles in between held opposite positions on the Roman occupation, tax collector Matthew worked for them, while Simon the Cananaean, or “zealot,” worked against them.

Jesus wasn't ignorant of their character flaws or political differences but he still called them and empowered them to continue his mission.

The words he used to send them out in chapter 10 v8 mirror what he himself was doing.

'Proclaim this message:

The kingdom of heaven has come near. 'Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; Freely give'

It was not simply about physical healing, but restoration to wholeness – bringing God's shalom, his Kingdom.

**God's love, poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit, is given to us to
share generously, to take into every
place we go.**

Jesus' commissioning of the disciples challenges us today, as modern disciples, to see our faith as actively responding to and partaking in God's mission. The task of healing, restoration, and godly leadership is not confined to Jesus alone, but is entrusted to us, his followers, to all of us who have benefitted from and know his peace, his grace and his salvation.

With such a task, it is no wonder the helpers are few. If we take the task on ourselves in our own strength, we will burn out, become bad-tempered and judgemental, and fall foul of saviour complexes and self-aggrandisement. It is through God's love, poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, that we are able to generously share in Christ's mission and take it wherever we go. (Romans 5)

Here in Matthew the mission is solely to the Gentiles, but with the coming of the Holy Spirit it is extended:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1)
We see in Jesus the enormity - the jaw-dropping enormity - of God's love and generosity. We are not called to keep it to ourselves, holding on to it like Gollum's precious in *The Lord of the Rings*, but to share it wholeheartedly, just as Jesus did, just as he commissioned his disciples to do, and just as he calls us, his followers, to do.

God's generous love is a gift to be shared generously.

