

- Speaker 1: [00:09](#) Hello and welcome
- Speaker 2: [00:10](#) to this episode of the St Andrew's Enfield podcast with me, Steve Griffiths. In this episode, I want to spend some time thinking about compassion and what it means for us to live compassionately. And to do that, we're going to be thinking about a passage from Mark's Gospel, from Mark Chapter Seven Verses 24 to 37, in which Jesus heals a Syrophenician woman's daughter, and then goes on to heal a man who is deaf and mute. And from this passage, I think we can draw out three principles for ourselves about how we can live more compassionately and show greater compassion towards others. I don't know about you, but whenever I watch the news, I just feel so disturbed and horrified at what I see. So much war, so many civil unrest situations. There's refugees, increasing knife crime and violence, and it just overwhelms me and I hardly know where to start in terms of feeling, let alone in terms of practical response.
- Speaker 2: [01:31](#) I just don't know what to do with such images. I just don't know how to react to the scale of these humanitarian crises that seem to be engulfing our world. But in this podcast, I don't really want to talk about the politics of the situation, but I do want us to think together about the notion of compassion and how as Christians, we are called to reach out in a practical way to those in need. And this Gospel reading from Mark Chapter Seven has got a lot to teach us about how compassion actually works. So what I want to do is firstly to think about the context of the passage and then, as I say, to draw out these three principles that show us how we can show compassion to others in a very practical and pragmatic
- Speaker 1: [02:32](#) way.
- Speaker 2: [02:41](#) So firstly then, let's think about the context of the passage. The first thing to note is that when Jesus performed these healings, he didn't differentiate between racial groupings. He didn't just show compassion only to his own people, but he reached out with love to those who were of a different ethnicity as well. We're told in verse 24 that Jesus set out and went away to the District of Tyre. Now, this is important because Jesus didn't come from Tyre. Jesus was a Jew and Tyre was a non Jewish region. It was a place where Gentiles lived. So for him and his disciples Tyre was, it was sort of bandit country, and there would have been all sorts of rumors and gossip and speculation amongst the Jews as to how these Gentiles lived and what sort of practices they would have engaged in. There would have been an innate racism and suspicion amongst many of the Jews

with regard to the Gentile foreigners who lived in the region of Tyre.

Speaker 2: [03:57](#) They were foreigners. They were different people. You know, "they're nothing to do with us. They're not our problem." But Jesus was prepared to go into their land and meet with them and relate to them as fellow human beings and not categorize them according to race or religion or the color of their skin. But in the second story, we heard, the healing of the man who was deaf or mute, we read in verse 31 that Jesus is back towards the Sea of Galilee, which is his homeland. And Jesus shows exactly the same level of care and compassion to the man that he meets there. So for Jesus there is no 'them and us'. There is no Jew and Gentile. There are just human beings in need of compassion and grace and love. And in these two stories, we see Jesus coming alongside two desperate people.

Speaker 2: [05:08](#) They've nowhere to go. They've no one who can understand the agonies of their situations. But Jesus doesn't regard them by gender or race or religion. Instead, he just meets them in their humanity and shows compassion towards them. So if we are to be truly Christlike in our lives, I think that we need to not think of people according to race and gender and sexuality and religion. We can't be selective in where we show compassion or to whom we show compassion. Because here Jesus shows us a better way. Jesus shows us that compassion is for all people regardless of the accident of their birth. And as we try to follow Jesus, we need to be nonselective in our compassion. We need to meet people as people, not according to stereotypes that we may hold in our mind. So how do we show compassion to those in need? What does this passage from the Bible teach us about how compassion actually works? As I say, I think there's three principles for us to consider.

Speaker 2: [06:52](#) The first principle is that compassion begins with dialogue. How can we show compassion if we are not in dialogue with those whom we seek to help? Too often churches have thought that compassion can be shown by writing a check to a charity or just throwing money at a situation; supporting mission agencies by giving them money, responding to crisis appeals by taking a special collection. Now, of course, these responses are very important. I'm not decrying them in any way. But very often the unspoken belief is that once we've written the check, we've done our bit, we've salved our consciences and we can now go back to getting on with life again. But that is not compassion. The word 'compassion' is derived from two Latin words together, mean 'to suffer with', so there is an emotional and spiritual engagement with the situations of others that is at the

root of compassion. And we cannot forge that level of emotional engagement just by writing checks to charities. Instead, we need to form some sort of dialogue with the situation that we're seeking to engage with. And in these stories from Mark seven, Jesus engages in dialogue with those who are suffering. But what's interesting is that he dialogues with them both very differently. And crucially he does it on their terms, not on his terms. He dialogues with them both in ways that they will understand, not in any way expecting them to meet him on his level. So let's just think about the stories to see what I mean.

Speaker 2: [09:24](#)

Verse Twenty seven, Jesus begins the dialogue with the Syrophenician woman by saying, "let the children be fed first for it's not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Now, to be honest, that doesn't seem like a very friendly opening comment does it? You'd think Jesus could have come up with something better and kinder than to compare the woman with a scrounging dog! But actually I think Jesus is being quite clever here because what he's trying to do is to draw the woman into a conversation that will result in not only meeting her immediate need, but will also result in the spiritual growth of both her and the disciples who were with Jesus. And as Jesus and this woman continue to talk in spiritual metaphor, you can almost feel her strength rising. You can, you can feel her faith getting stronger. And then Jesus meets the need by healing her daughter.

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It is such an incredible dialogue. But in the second story, Jesus acts completely differently. Now, there's something beautifully compassionate about Jesus approach to the dialogue here. Because here we have a man who is deaf and mute who is, to all intents and purposes, cut off from the rest of the world. And I imagine that he must've been really frightened and very unconfident. He wouldn't have been a lover of crowds and probably would have been deeply embarrassed when the crowd pulled him into center stage to stand in front of this strange man whose name he wouldn't even have known. And then what happens? Well, in verse 33, we read, "Jesus took him aside in private." Now that was such a lovely thing to do, wasn't it? He could have healed the man publicly and amazed the crowd, but his heart was moved by compassion and care and concern for how the man felt. And rather than make himself look brilliant by doing a public healing, instead he chose to act in private.

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Jesus wasn't into publicity stunts. He was into compassion. And then to express his compassion in an even more personal way, he carries out the healing in sign language. As we hear from verse 33, "Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears and he spat

and touched his tongue. Then he looked up to heaven." Now this is a beautifully intimate moment that shows us that Jesus always meets us where we are at in ways that we can understand. He doesn't force us out of our comfort zone when we need healing. He's always prepared to come into our world to engage with our frailties on our terms and bring us the touch of grace and the touch of love that we long for. There's a really deep humility about the way in which Jesus showed compassion in these stories. So when we want to show compassion to those in need, the first step I think is to begin a dialogue with them, human being to human being;

Speaker 2: [13:13](#) casting aside all of our stereotypes and our preconceptions about them. The first step is to do what we can, within our limited means, to build relationship with them. Now, of course, to give money to crisis appeals. Of course, to financially support mission agencies. But not to believe that by writing a check somehow our job is done. Instead, we dialogue as best we can to build a relationship with the people we minister to. But a relationship that is built on their terms, not ours, where the power lies with them, not us. And we don't seek to dehumanize them through our acts of charity. But instead we seek to build them up as beautiful children of

Speaker 1: [14:17](#) God.

Speaker 2: [14:28](#) The second principle we can learn is that compassion doesn't look for anything in return. Compassion seeks to meet the needs of people without any expectation that they should give anything back to us or somehow fall into line with our agendas or our ways of doing things. In the first story, Jesus says to the woman in Verse Twenty Nine, "for saying that you may go, the demon has left your daughter." And in the second story, in verse 34, Jesus, heals the man. But in neither story do we hear that the person who had received compassion then goes on to be a disciple of Jesus, a follower of Jesus. Jesus did not show compassion in order to get more disciples. He just showed compassion because it was the right thing to do. Jesus did not have any ulterior motive in showing compassion. He just showed compassion, full stop. And how I wish that the history of the church was modeled on this example of Jesus Christ. Because the temptation for us is to show compassion towards others and then expect them to come and join us on our terms.

Speaker 2: [16:00](#) We want new people in Church. We want people to become Christians. We want to offer the hand of friendship and to welcome them. But ultimately, we want them to join us and become one of us, and to even play by our rules. That's the

story of the Christian church history, isn't it? The church's history has become like a club with membership rules and many local churches operate like a clique where people are expected to conform in order to belong. But that is the complete opposite of what Jesus is doing in these stories. Here, Jesus reaches out and meets the woman and the man in their culture. He doesn't ask them to join his club. He doesn't set any provisos for their welcome. He just accepts them as they are and he shows compassion and grace and then allows them to continue in their own cultural way of being. And that, I think, is just how the church should be. The church must not think of itself as a club to be joined. The church must not put boundaries around itself. Instead, it has to be prepared to dismantle the boundaries, to get rid of the idea of 'us and them' and proactively choose to show compassion towards others who may have very different ways of being, with no expectation that they should, even as an act of thanksgiving, come and join us. We are called to show compassion. We call to serve. Full stop. No ulterior motives.

Speaker 2: [18:20](#)

And then the third principle that we learn from this passage is that compassion simply meets the need. Uh, these two people were desperate. They were absolutely desperate. We read in Verse Twenty Six that the woman begged Jesus. The man in the second story was so desperate, but he couldn't even speak the words to express his agony. And Jesus very simply meets their needs. He cast the demon out of the daughter and he gives hearing and speech to the man. It's as simple as that. Jesus doesn't analyze, he doesn't dictate to them, he doesn't preach at them. He simply sees the need and he meets the need. And that is compassion. See the need, meet the need. Full stop. There's nothing more to be said about it.

Speaker 2: [19:34](#)

So we watch the news and often we feel utterly helpless about the crises we see. And we may think about our own communities and reflect on those who are lonely or grieving or unemployed, those struggling with mental health issues or debt or homelessness, those who feel utterly helpless and unloved and unlovable. And we want to reach out with compassion. How do we do it? Well, first we begin a dialogue - on their terms not on ours. Second, we don't ask for anything in return when we engage with them. And third, we just meet their need without any agendas of our own. That is compassion. That is the way of Christ, and that has to be the way of the church. See the need, meet the need.

Speaker 1: [20:43](#)

Full stop.

Speaker 2: [20:56](#) So, thank you for taking the time to listen to this podcast today. If you've got any feedback or any comments, then please do email me, steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org. Check out the church website standrewsenfield.com. Our Facebook page is St Andrew's Enfield. Please do subscribe to these podcasts and share them with anyone else who you think may be interested. Wherever you are today, whatever you doing, I hope that you have a really, really good day and I look forward to being back with you again for a future episode of the podcast. So thanks again for your time. Thanks for listening and have a wonderful day.

Speaker 1: [21:39](#) Bye.