Compassion Sunday

## (Acts 3:1-8)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church, this is Compassion Sunday and I am so glad that you are here today. Compassion International is a ministry, an organization that we believe in, because they really make a difference in children’s lives. The thing is, in spite of the great work they do in the lives of so many children they can’t do it without people like you and me who will partner with them.

The problem is that it seems as if there has been a drastic decline of empathy in America, a lack of compassion, and so when I say there are millions of children that aren’t getting the appropriate healthcare, that are hungry, uneducated, and poorly clothed it doesn’t shock us like it used to. And so, these are troubling times when so many are unwilling to be interrupted or inconvenienced by the needs of another human being, but for us as followers of Christ the Bible says that compassion is more than just an emotion, compassion is an action.

James chapter 2, verse 15 says, “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:15-17).

In other words, to say that you care but not to act is really not to care at all because true compassion demands action. True compassion moves you from the depth of your soul in such a way that it interrupts you and takes you outside of yourself to get involved in the life of someone else.

In the text I want to share with you today the circumstances surrounding the story is just as powerful as the story itself. As we come to Acts chapter 3, Jerusalem was in an uproar because for three years Jesus has shaken everything up, but now Jesus had been murdered, but then he rose from the dead and everyone was greatly disturbed. And so, now, even in his dying Jesus was still shaking things up, Jerusalem was in turmoil, the Romans as well as the religious leaders were struggling with what to do.

As we come to verse one of our text we find “Peter and John going up to the temple.” Now, they weren’t interested in causing trouble, but they hadn’t given up on their Judean brothers, nor had they forgotten Jesus’ command to go and preach the gospel. And so, in spite of the unstable and unpredictable environment surrounding religious activities in the temple, “they were going to pray at three in the afternoon” (Acts 3:1).

The Bible says as they were walking along, they encountered “a man crippled from birth who was being carried to the temple gate, the one called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts” (Acts 3:2).

And so, their intention was to go into the temple to pray, but they encounter this man who is stuck outside of the temple. In fact, every day he is carried there, placed outside of the gate, just outside of the temple, and so he is stuck outside of the religious system of Judaism. He hasn’t been able to become part of that, he’s likely never been inside of the gates, and what I want you to understand is that many times the greatest ministry happens outside of the church.

In other words, so many times we go to church, we’re headed to the church, looking for our ministry opportunity. We come wanting to be heard, wanting to speak, preach, or sing, without recognizing that the church is really a training camp. And so, when we come together in the assembly it’s a pep rally, preparing us like boot camp, so that you are better prepared to carry out your ministry outside of these doors.

Now, I know that many people don’t understand that, but think about this for a moment, when Jesus got ready to teach, he said,

"Come to me… Take my yoke upon you and learn from me… and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-30).

And so, whenever Jesus was going to teach, he said, “Come,” but whenever he was ready for his disciples to preach and minister to the people he said, “Go.” “As you go, preach…” (Matthew 10:7).

In the same way, when we come in here to pray, we come to worship, to be taught and to learn, so that when we “go” we are prepared, because the real fight is going on outside.

I know there are a lot of people who want to fight in here, they will argue over what translation of the Bible we use, baptism, communion, how we pray or the style of music, but you and I have to save our energy because right outside the gate there is somebody who needs you. Outside the church is somebody who could be blessed by your testimony, and so we’ve got to redirect our energy, remembering that Jesus gave us power to be his witnesses. Not exclusively in here, we do need to encourage one another in the church, but Jesus wants us to be his witnesses down the street at the grocery store, at the gas station, and out in the community.

In other words, when we get inside, we want to be taught and learn, we want to be slow to speak and quick to listen, because when we walk out the door we’ve got to be prepared to engage with our culture. And so, ministry is not in here, your ministry is out there, the opportunity to witness is out there, the real fight is out there, and when we get outside, when we walk out the door, we’ve got to activate the anointing, because there is ministry just outside the gates.

Peter and John were just going up to pray when they encountered a crippled man, he was sitting there begging just outside the gates, and they recognized that their calling was out here, their ministry was out here, just outside of the temple. Today, God is looking for somebody just like Peter and John was going up to pray, but you’re going to recognize that your purpose is out there, you’re going to stumble into your ministry out there. And this may be God’s word to you today, because we don’t always understand our purpose, but sometimes you just bump into it, stumbling into it while you are doing your normal church thing.

These two disciples just stumbled into their purpose, discovered their calling, recognizing the reason that they were there, but they just stumbled into it. In the same way, we don’t always understand exactly how God is going to use us today. We don’t always recognize what God has called us to do today, but he has a way of letting you stumble into it, and it’s often revealed in somebody else’s problem.

We’ve been talking about compassion, sponsoring children through Compassion International, and I wonder if God can trust you with somebody else’s problem? The apostle Paul said it this way,

“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Some of you may be wondering what you’re calling is, what your purpose is, and sometimes God is just waiting to see if he can trust you with somebody else’s problems. And I know we all have our excuses, we all have our own problems we’re dealing with, but God often calls us to get involved in other people’s problems, because as you reach out to help somebody else, as you’re serving somebody else, you quit worrying about your own problems.

And so, if you want some help, you’ve got to be willing to give some help. If you want some love, you’ve got to be willing to give some love, and Jesus promised,

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over…" (Luke 6:38).

At just the right moment, Peter and John are coming up to pray, but God was planning something else. He was going to redirect their attention from themselves, from their grocery list of prayers, and let them stumble into someone else’s problems.

In other words, somebody else had greater needs, this wasn’t just about them, they were just coming up to the temple to pray but God was going to interrupt them with somebody else’s problems. Today, there are some of you that God has strategically put in a place to help somebody else. He wants you to get your mind off yourself, to get your mind off your problems, and so he’s going to let you stumble on somebody else who is worse off than you.

When you dare to offer yourself in God’s service, getting involved in somebody else’s problems, your anointing will activate in the power of God is going to come upon you. When you make yourself available, allowing God to interrupt your agenda, and get busy doing something for the Lord, you will discover that he will do more than you ever asked or imagined in your life.

Peter and John stumble upon this guy, it’s the time of prayer, it’s when they usually come in and pray for what they need, but they have a divine encounter with this guy you had a greater need than they did. This lame man had been crippled from birth, this was all he had ever known, brokenness was all that he had ever known, he had never walked, he had never experienced the freedom of mobility, he had always been the guy left behind, the one overlooked, and yet God allowed him to get the help he needed.

Some of you today could be that one that God uses to help. You could get in your car and go down to the hospital or the homeless shelter, but there are opportunities right here in this room, after worship you can go back to the Compassion display and find children who need your help. Like the crippled man was laid at the temple gate, he was placed in close proximity to the people of God, with the hope that just because it’s always been that way, it doesn’t have to stay that way. Every day he was placed there by his family and friends with the hope that someone would show him compassion.

And today, God caused Peter and John to stumble over this lame man, causing these two groups of people to collide, worshipers and beggars, the mobile and the handicapped, the independent and the dependent, and we know it didn’t happen by accident, because our God intended that they would be a blessing to each other, that they would walk into their purpose in a way that they never had before. You see, it wasn’t just Peter and John that were going to be used by God to help this man, this man was also going to be used to help Peter and John. And sometimes, you may just stumble into it, but being the answer to other people’s problems can be a blessing to you.

The truth is that all of us need help somewhere, like the crippled man, all of us are limited somewhere, handicapped somewhere. Each one of us have somewhere in our lives where we are limited in what we can do. It doesn’t matter how good you look, what you do, how much money you have, or even how important you feel, you have someplace in your life where you are limited. And so, you may be able to walk, but maybe you can’t run well, it’s not your knees, but it’s your ankles. You may look strong on the outside, but somewhere you are weak. If it’s not in your health, it’s in your job, or your family, your marriage, or your kids, but somewhere in your life you are handicapped.

I am so thankful that we serve an equal opportunity God, that limited people, handicapped people, hurting people, struggling people can come to the house of God and receive God’s grace. In Acts chapter 3, this crippled man is sitting outside the temple gate, outside of this religious establishment, outside of this place of worship, and he’s just trying to get a little help. The Bible says in verse three,

“When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money” (Acts 3:3).

Now, I know there are some of you who haven’t recognized your brokenness, and so you’ve never done any begging. But if you ever recognize where you have been incapacitated, where you are limited, you are going to beg. You might not beg where we see you, but when you recognize your brokenness, sooner or later you’re going to do some begging. Sooner or later, you’re going to need something from Jesus.

Like the Canaanite woman came to Jesus, crying out,

“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly" (Matthew 15:22).

Like the blind man, Bartimaeus, hearing that Jesus was coming began to shout,

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:46-47).

Or the tax collector who hesitated even to draw near, but who stood at a distance, wouldn’t even look up to heaven, and said,

"God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

If you ever recognize your brokenness, you’re going to beg somewhere, you may do it at three in the afternoon at the time of prayer, but sooner or later you are going to do some begging.

The Bible says the crippled man was looking at the crowd, looking at the people coming in, when he made eye contact with Peter and John. He asked them for money, because he knew he needed something, but he just wasn’t exactly sure what. I wonder if you have ever been in a dilemma where you knew you needed something, but you weren’t exactly sure what it was?

“Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So, the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them” (Acts 3:4-5).

I wonder if there are any of you who came to church today, you didn’t know what I was going to preach, but you were expecting to receive something?

In other words, you didn’t get dressed, rush in here just to say you were here on Facebook. No, you came to church, you walked through those doors, because you were expecting to receive something. You don’t know what it is, you don’t know how it’s going to happen, you don’t know who God is going to use, but you’ve got a feeling that before this is over… you’re expecting to get something.

And so, there he was begging, he was expecting something, but he had no idea what. Peter said, “Look at us!” And so, the man gave them his attention, he was looking for a little bit of change, but a little change wasn’t going to fix his problem, giving him a little change was only a Band-Aid on the problem. But God wasn’t going to answer his prayer with a temporary solution to an ongoing problem. When God fixes this, it wasn’t going to be a patch job.

Like many of the children looking for sponsors with Compassion International this man had people who had provided temporary solutions to long-term problems. Family and neighbors who only create codependent relationships, who just help you get through the day, but don’t really fix you where you are completely free. Peter and John were outside of the gate, the church was outside of the temple, they told the crippled man, look at us, we’ve got the answer. They said, we don’t have what you want, but we’ve got something to give.

“Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you” (Acts 3:6).

In other words, he says, I’ve got something, it may not be what you’re asking for, but we’ve got something for you, it’s the gift of God. And so, Peter and John came to the temple prepared to preach about the greatness of God and the Holy Spirit wanted this crippled man to experience the goodness of God in his own life.

“Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6).

When Peter said that, demons began to tremble, because the devil doesn’t like for you to call on the name of Jesus. You can call on Andy, call on Steve, call on the mayor, you can call on the President, but when you call on the name of Jesus, demons tremble at the sound of his name.

You see, the name of Jesus has been exalted above every name, so that the name of Jesus,

“God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord…” (Philippians 2:9-11).

Peter said, in the name of Jesus, the water walking Jesus, the mountain moving Jesus, the bread of heaven Jesus, “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6).

His situation is about to change, that broken thing, that weak thing, that stiff thing, that limited thing, was getting ready to move. Peter said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” But the problem was that the crippled man didn’t move.

Some of you have been laying there long enough, you’ve been crying long enough, you’ve been making excuses long enough, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. Somebody needs to get up and walk, just walk somewhere, anywhere but where you were, put your faith in action, this is your time to move out. This is your time to show up in unexpected places, somewhere, anywhere, just not where you were.

Peter said, walk, but even after hearing the word, the crippled man still didn’t walk. And so, what do you do when you have done all that you know how to do, you have prayed all that you know how to pray, you served the Lord, you loved your neighbor, you paid your tithes and offerings, but the problem still won’t move? What do you do when you’ve still got a problem, the problem is still standing there, you said everything you know how to say and nothing happens? Well, look at what Peter does in verse seven,

“Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up” (Acts 3:7).

Peter was too radical to take no for an answer, so he took him by the hand and he helped him up. This is our moment today, this is our time to help up some people, to snatch up some children, to sponsor some children with Compassion International. They may have heard the gospel, but they’re not moving, I don’t know who I’m talking to, but God said take them by the hand and help them up.

You see, they received enough handouts, they been carried to the gate to beg, but now they need a hand up, they need a helping hand, somebody to pull them to their feet. Peter helped him up and the Bible says, not gradually, but…

“Instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong” (Acts 3:7).

God exceeded his expectations, God didn’t put anything in his cup, but he put something in his weakest place, because when I am weak, then I am strong. And so, God put something in his ankles and the crippled man,

“He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God” (Acts 3:8).

They flung open the temple doors, and the man who had been outside of the church, came into the church, not to get healed, but he came in already healed.

The crippled man had no offering, he can’t give anything, and so he comes into the temple courts offering God his praise. He comes in walking and jumping and praising God and even now we see that Jesus does some of his best work outside of the temple. Jesus healed most people outside of the temple, outside of orthodoxy, outside of normal religious ideas, because he came to change things.

The Bible says the people were shocked, they were astonished, this was challenging their faith, because the crippled man, the lame man, “went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.”

Now, if Peter and John had kept walking, if they had not allowed themselves to be interrupted, if they had left without stopping for the crippled man, he would still be there, and he would remain there. His family and friends would continue to help him, just enabling him to remain there in that place, just getting by day after day, but I believe that there are some of you today, there is nothing that is keeping you from reaching out and giving a child a helping hand, reaching out and pulling them up. There is somebody that needs you, and if you don’t do something, nothing will ever change.

There is nothing holding you back today, nothing keeping you back, God wants you to stop living in the past, to stop telling yourself what you can’t do, and he says stand on your feet. Right now, I believe God is pulling somebody, drawing somebody to their feet. And so, I want to give you an invitation, if God is drawing you right now, would you respond?

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