

Sermon: All That Matters
Scripture: Matthew 9:34 – 10:8
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
Date: June 14th, 2026

Jesus stood in a crowd and has this overwhelming sense of compassion for the people because they seemed so lost, “like sheep without a shepherd, helpless and harassed.” The original Greek word that we translate as “compassion” in this passage is literally translated as “moved to one’s bowels (or guts)”, which was for the Mediterranean culture the seat of emotion, the place in us out of which love and compassion and feelings arise. We tend to speak of it as being in the heart but for them compassion arose from the gut or the bowels. Which makes sense. Haven’t you ever been moved in compassion for someone and just felt sick about their suffering– down in your gut? And this, the Gospel of Matthew explains, is what Jesus was experiencing as he was moving through the crowd on that day, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing the sick. They were lost, hungry, fearful and with Jesus’ open heart, or churning guts, he was overwhelmed with a sense of compassion for them. Jesus was not defended or hardened against others’ sufferings. It’s one of the indications of his God-nature, but such gut wrenching compassion in the face of so much suffering around him was not an easy place to live. The suffering of his crucifixion was one thing but he also suffered from his compassion for the suffering of others.

Dave Matthews, from The Dave Matthews Band, has a song about the life of Jesus called “The Christmas Song”. At one point that I’ve always found so poignant he sings this question that he has Jesus asking: “Father up above, why in all this hatred do you fill me up with love, love love?” And

then later, “Father up above, why in all this anger, do you fill me up with love, love, love?” It speaks of this compassion that filled Jesus and finally brought him to a point of handing over his own life for the sake of others and even then, his compassion is so great that as he hangs there on the cross he says compassionately “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Moved to his bowels, sickened in his guts, by how lost the people were around him, how frightened, like sheep without a shepherd, and how much suffering they caused for themselves.

But really what were these people wanting that Jesus was feeling compassion for? They were lost from where and hungering for what and fearful of whom? They probably could have used food and housing, many of them, and relief from the heavy taxes imposed upon them and a plan for how to get out from under the thumb of the occupation, but none of that really is what Jesus was handing out. He does offer some of those who were sick the very practical gift of healing, and for some of those who were hungry he multiplies the loaves and fish, but it seems that even then the healing and the feeding was about something bigger and deeper than just being physically well or satisfying physical hunger.

When he sends out the disciples as his instruments of healing and caring and peace, his commission to them is first of all to proclaim that the kingdom of God is at hand, to preach the good news of the kingdom. The healings and cleansings and casting out of demons are above all else were a sign of the kingdom, the indications of what the kingdom is like that is being preached. He could have said “preach the good news of the kingdom and kill the Romans and liberate our people” and if he had been a Zealot that’s exactly what he would have said. Or he could have said “preach the good news of the kingdom and teach people to keep the kosher laws and the purity

code and to attend synagogue regularly” and if he had been a Pharisee that’s exactly what he would have said. Or he could have said “preach the good news of the kingdom, obey all of Rome’s laws, bow to Caesar, the Lord of Life, and contribute faithfully to the betterment of Rome,” which is exactly what he would have said had he been a Roman Statesman. But instead Jesus was Jesus, a human being revealing God and heaven in our midst, and so he said “preach the good news and... heal the sick, cast out the demons, cleanse the lepers, etc.... and in that way give them a sense of the Kingdom among us.”

So what is the good news Jesus asks them to preach. The good news is not that their every physical need will be satisfied by Jesus and his disciples, because they couldn’t possibly get to everyone in the crowd to satisfy all their needs. The good news is obviously not, despite what so many Christians want to make the main point, “when you die you’re going to go to heaven and not to hell.” He hasn’t said that to the disciples and the disciples have no idea that Jesus is even going to die and resurrect and defeat death at this point so the good news is something else.

The good news that these various acts of kindness and love express is quite simply that in Jesus God was among them and with them in a way God had promised for generations AND that they matter to God. Even the least of them; the sick and the lepers, the prostitutes and the demon possessed and dispossessed, maybe even especially them, they matter to God. Maybe not to Rome and maybe not to their religious leaders and maybe not to the people around them, but the good news is that to God, they matter. This comes as particularly good news to the poor who mostly surrounded Jesus in that crowd and followed him like lost sheep, because so much in the culture suggested that they really didn’t matter; whether it was wages that didn’t

make ends meet, or housing that was not adequate for their families, or the numbers of the poor that were used for the projects of the wealthy, so much indicated to them that they just didn't matter. But the good news from Jesus was that they do matter.

For those of us of greater material means, who tend to work in situations where we have more power over others and receive good money for the work we do and can basically get what we need and want, we can more easily create a sense for ourselves that we matter and we create that mostly by what we do or what we have or who we know or what we have accomplished. But Jesus said that he did not come to the healthy but to the sick. He said in other words, that he was not coming for those who apparently mattered but to those who were discarded as worthless. It wasn't their physical hunger so much that churned Jesus' bowels in compassion for them but their hunger for knowing that somewhere, somehow, to someone, they mattered. And so Jesus spoke to and touched the prostitute, the fisherman, the tax collector, the addict, the leper, the adulteress, the woman bleeding for 12 years who touched his robe in the crowd, the roman centurion who had a different heart from his other soldiers and to these people, he looked them in the eyes and said to them basically "I notice you. You matter to me and to God."

What an incredible thing to be told, eh? "I notice you. You matter!" NOT that you matter because of what you do and what you earn and have accomplished and not because you have perfected yourself. NO, you matter because there is Someone, namely God, to whom you matter! This is the good news that Jesus was proclaiming and that the people surrounding Jesus were so hungry to hear.

Fast forward 2000 years... when we here in this church talk about being Open and Affirming and when our denomination says “you are welcome in our churches whoever you are and wherever you are on life’s journey” this is the good news that we are talking about. We are doing the best we can to be faithful to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ that everyone matters; young or old, gay or straight, rich or poor, cis or trans-gender, neuro-typical or neuro-divergent, law-abiding or with a criminal record, documented or undocumented, teetotaler or drunk, variously colored. It is the beauty of the church... or should be the beauty reflected in the church, it’s heterogeneity, the fact that we can be an immense diversity of people all turned to held under the spirit of Christ, loved and claimed by God as beloved, where everyone is noticed, no one is discarded as cheap and unworthy, everyone matters and knows they matter.

One of the most life-changing experiences of my life that got me on the road to ministry was my experience at the Abbey of Regina Laudis, a Benedictine monastery in Bethlehem, Connecticut. For those who haven’t heard me talk about the abbey, my wife, Tracy, and I spent over a year there. She was the artist-in-residence and I was in a land program where we worked on the farm and joined the nuns in their daily rhythm of prayer. It’s a beautiful place, the Abbey is, on a number of levels and if I had to characterize what exactly makes the place so spiritually profound and as a result so life changing for the people that relate there, I would say that it is just this - this unconditional positive regard with which the nuns relate to you there. They have this amazing way of leading you to feel like you really matter, like you are the bees knees, their favorite person that has ever found your way to them. And you ask around to other people that relate to the Abbey and of course you hear that each person has a similar sense. And

maybe some of us are a little disappointed that it's not just us, but that's their gift, their charism. They are Benedictines and Benedictine spirituality is all about hospitality. They commit to be cloistered on a spot of land for their lives and then they receive people from the outside world to them and send them back out restored and healed in many instances. And this I think is pure and simple how they do it: they simply remind the people who come there that on some fundamental level they matter. They live out God's truth that each of us matters and as a result they open people time and again to a place of interior receptivity to the work and movement of the Spirit in their lives.

That's the heart of our faith, the core of the good news, the purpose of the church and our lives as disciples of Christ. We receive the word in here that we matter to God, that everyone matters to God, and we are to go out there and treat everyone we come across like they matter too, for it is the truth of the matter. We matter. They matter. And that's all that matters.