

**“Let God Be Your Guide”**

Rev. Dr. Scott Paczkowski

[Referring to the Scripture reading] What makes the judge unjust is the lack of compassion that he had for this poor woman before him, from everything he was thinking, or his compassion toward anyone. He just wanted her to “shut up” and go away, so he could get on with his life. To grant her request was to simply make his life easier. It was all about him.

I was thinking about that lack of compassion and I thought about a book I read a number of years ago by a great theologian, Andrew Purvis. In his book “The Search for Compassion” he states, “Compassion is the impossible divine command that calls us to live as kingdom people in a world that does not recognize, nurture or admire such a life.”

I thought about that, about “kingdom people,” about how to live when everybody around you does not respect God’s way of living. I thought about you guys [talking to the young people sitting down front] and how wonderfully you did in preparing this water purification system; and I want to talk a little bit to the rest of the people about what you have learned.

[Talking to the congregation] Now the children, as they explained to you, had a class that Erin taught and they learned. But the difference was, they didn’t just learn with their minds to gather trivia or to figure out what could be done. It touched their hearts, so much so that they were a big pain in my neck. [Laughter] Because, like the judge, I was busy and had a lot to do, and they would not let it go - did you [he asked the young people]? You are right. You were my pain in the neck.

They wanted to do something, not just learn about it. They went to Erin and me, and they talked about what they wanted done - and they wanted it done now. [Laughter] I feel bad for their parents, I really do. [Laughter]

So we set about trying to figure out if we could make this happen, together. It was a lot easier said than done because, when you heard their talk - they did this in the late spring and the beginning of summer - and it took us this long to get it taken care of. We went to the denomination. We thought first, let’s look at El Salvador because we do things there. We have a relationship there.

It was the kids who told Erin and me why that wouldn’t work. Again, I was pretty darned impressed. They explained when you try to do a well - because they had studied up on it (that internet is good for more than finding out which celebrity is dating which other celebrity!). They got on line and found out that every foot cost a certain amount of money. But then you add a certain amount of money - depending on the soil content - or the density of the rocks involved. They were explaining this to me and it was going right over the top of my head. But they knew what they were talking about and, sure enough, the cost was way beyond what we could ever do, to provide a well dug down in El Salvador.

We had problems when we looked at South America. There was a transition in leadership and there was no one to really help us out in that moment. So then we were looking at other places. You had to wait for responses. One week would go into two, and then ended up at seven. So still while we were trying to figure out what was going on, the kids were tapping their feet going, “Where is my well?” So we kept going and finally Erin figured it out. She got a hold of someone in the denomination who said, “Wells are not helpful where we were looking in Haiti, but we have something that we are working on in water purification systems.” And, we thought, “Great, you don’t have to dig through rock. We can figure this out.” And it came to pass.

By this time it's early fall. The kids didn't have time with their other scheduling to meet with the Finance Committee and Stewardship, but Erin and I did a presentation explaining to them all of what the kids had worked through in the spring and summer, and what you heard from them this morning. They were so moved that they were touched by the Holy Spirit and they wanted this done. By their perseverance and compassion they made sure that this came to pass. And that water purification system was installed in the last week. Erin sent us pictures that it is up and running.

Now that is a neat story about kids wanting to do something and about staff trying to make it happen and the enthusiasm of the committees, but it is more than that. This is a God-moment. Every Wednesday night, at the end of our little 15-minute worship, Bill Ekhardt leads them [the kids] in singing. Then he asks them about their God-sightings. The kids learn to be looking throughout their week about how the Holy Spirit might be working in their midst. And kids - look at me for just a second - on Wednesday night none of you should have trouble finding something to mention, because it wasn't that you guys heard a story about people who had trouble finding good water and all you have to do is turn on the tap. The real important thing for you to know is that God worked through you. God guided you to make a difference and, because this few number of you got excited, hundreds - if not thousands - of times, people will be able to survive where they might have died, because you made sure that they are getting water today.

[Pastor Scott to the kids:] Now what happened in Haiti in the last couple of weeks? The hurricane passed right through. It devastated [the area]. You saw the pictures. You saw the news. You probably even thought about the water. What happened to the water purifier? In some places they still got their water, and one of those places was from your water purification system. It was not destroyed.

[Pastor Scott to the congregation:] God worked through their compassion and their perseverance to make this amazing difference. If children can bring life where there was only destruction and death, how much more can the rest of us do to change the world around us? If they can do that much, with so little, it shows that this world still has hope. We dare not give up and become bitter and resentful of the world around us. There is so much we can do to make a difference.

I want to share with you a quote by one of my favorite classic theologians: Jurgen Moltmann. He summarizes the Christian faith when he says, "...and those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. Peace with God means conflict with the world, for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present."

Now what that means, as an example, is that these kids were sick and tired after they had heard about what had happened. That there were people in this world who could not find healthy water to drink. They began to be frustrated in their hearts with the way the world is. They wanted to make sure that the Spirit of God, as kingdom people, made a difference and they couldn't sit still. They kept pestering Erin and me every single time we saw them. I tried to avoid them, but they chased me down the hall. Miserable children. [Laughter] It was that still small voice inside of them that said, we can't sit idly by while this is going on, never knowing the natural disaster that loomed.

[Pastor Scott to the kids:] Just think how much worse it would be without you, and you are just a group of children in Des Moines, Iowa. They are so far away and yet look at the difference you are making. Now sometimes in this world, that is so difficult to live in, we get pushed and pulled in so many ways. We have sports. We have plays. We have this event and that event, and video games, and all these other things. Most of those things, that are good in their own way, are about individual achievements. They are about what these kids can do to get ahead.

I have had parents tell me in other churches (you are all perfect here), but in other places [I've been told], that "our kids don't have time for church, because I'm trying to get them into a good college,

and they need to have this and this and this on their resumes,” and so forth and so on. *This* can go on their resume, and it may not look as good on paper as winning a division title, but this is not about them.

What they [Westminster kids] have learned today is that the greatest feeling in the world is not a victory for themselves, but a difference made for someone else. When they feel compassion for someone else, they feel the spirit of God in their hearts. The greatest place to get that feeling and that understanding is from church, because this is where the Holy Spirit speaks and moves and where we have our being. You can do great things on the football field or on a volleyball court, but you are never going to change the lives of thousands of people by getting just a few people together with a compassionate heart, the way these kids have done in these short few months.

So keep being determined. Keep pestering Erin (while you leave me alone), [Laughter] and believe that the Holy Spirit will continue to use you to make a difference. I promise you that [that the Holy Spirit will use you] not just while you are here in church, but in everything you do, because you take God’s compassion, love and perseverance with you to your schools, to your families to everything you do.

[Pastor Scott to the congregation:] If they can do it, so can you, and so can I. We need to have that kind of optimism and dedication. The youngest, who taught us the most, we thank today and we thank Jesus Christ through the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.