

## THE MASTER HAS COME

There lived in India a well-known poet named Tagore. One morning his servant was late coming to work. Tagore became angrier by the minute as he waited for him to arrive. Finally, the servant came in and began his duties. Tagore had already decided to fire him. He said, "Stop what you are doing and get out. You are fired." The man kept sweeping and said, "My little girl died last night." This incident points up one of the great needs in the world today. The need for compassion. Compassion has been defined as "sorrow for the sufferings of another, with the urge to help." But we have cheapened the word. When we hear the word compassion, we really think of pity- and we hear such nauseating phrases as "pity the fool." Pity is not worth a plug nickel. It was pity that caused one man praying in the temple to say, self-righteously, "I am thankful I'm not like that man over there."

No we do not need any more pity. We have had enough of that. What the world longs for is compassion. George Buttrick, in *The Interpreter's Bible*, wrote that the word we translate as compassion is a much stronger word, meaning the pain of love. Compassion is the pain of love. The master has come- and is moved with compassion. After Jesus had announced the theme of his campaign, "The Kingdom of God is at hand," and had chosen twelve to be disciples, he set out on a preaching tour which carried him to small towns and villages.

Matthew tells us that Jesus taught in the synagogues, and preached the Gospel of the Kingdom. Not only that- he also healed those who had diseases and infirmities. As his fame began to spread, large groups of people came to hear and see him. They hung on every word. They longed for the healing touch. Then, Matthew says, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." It was not pity Jesus had. He did not feel sorry for these people; He felt the pain of love.

We see this compassion of Jesus, this pain of love, in other places. On one occasion, a large crowd had come to hear him. After he had healed the sick he said to the disciples, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." He took the loaves and the fish and fed the people. On another occasion he went to the city of Nain. A man who had died was being carried out of the city, the only son of a widow. Luke wrote, "When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, Do not weep." Jesus restored the young man's life. Then, once when Jesus was preaching in Galilee, a leper came up to him and said, "If you will, you can make me clean." Mark reports, "Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched him, and said to him, I will; be clean."

Everything Jesus did was rooted in this compassion- the pain of love. His words- the stern words, the comforting words, the healing words, the forgiving words, all had their root in the pain of love. His deeds of

mercy stem from compassion. All the miracles of Jesus grew out of the pain of love. Never did Jesus do a miracle just for the sake of a miracle itself. Never did he try to impress an audience. No, instead you see Jesus being moved with compassion. He sees a pain, a hurt, a sorrow, a loss- and the pain of love causes him to reach out to touch, to lift, to help, to forgive, to transform, to encourage, to challenge. The master has come- and is moved with compassion. There are three things to remember about the compassion of Jesus.

First, we see the pain of love in incarnation. It is the compassion God felt for us, his creation, that caused Him to send Jesus Christ into the world. Incarnation is a fancy word which means God took on human flesh, and came into our experience. The pain of love was the motive force behind that incarnation. "God so loved the world that he gave his only son..." God knew this was necessary because in spite of everything he had done for his children, they were still in trouble. He made them a covenant they had not kept. He gave them a law they had not obeyed. He sent them prophets they had not heeded. So now God would send them his Son to love them-to care for them, to touch them, to reveal himself to them, to win them, to convince them, to compel them. Wherever Jesus went to help-and lift- and encourage-and heal- we see there the heart of God, the love of God, the compassion of God, and the pain of God's love. Love is often painful.

A young woman fell in love with a young man. They were going on a picnic. It was their first date. She was afraid he would find out how near-sighted she was. So, she went out to her uncle's farm, where they were to have the picnic, and stuck a pin in a tree. Later, as they were eating, she said, "Oh, look. Someone left a pin in that tree." She ran to retrieve it, and tripped over a cow. Love is often painful.

But the pain of God's love is good news for us because we are often like the people Jesus touched- the fallen, the blind, the deaf, the sinners, the lost, the least, the despised, and the unloved. We are those people.

A little first grader hurried into the classroom and said, "Teacher, two boys are fighting on the playground, and I think the one on the bottom wants you." We sometimes feel life gets us down. God has sent Jesus Christ to rescue us-to show us the way, to help us, to meet us, to lead us. An old rabbi told a story of a boy who ran away from home. He was one-hundred days' journey away. He sent his father a message that he wanted to come home, but he didn't think he could make it. His father sent him a message back: "go as far as you can, and I will come the rest of the way to meet you." God has done that in the incarnation.

Second, we hear the pain of love in identification. The pain of God's love, which sent Jesus into the world, is heard in his identification with us. Or not only did Jesus come into the world, he became like us. He became one of us. He identified himself with us completely. Saint Paul wrote in Philippians, "Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

Jesus Christ emptied himself. He changed places. He gave up the highest status and took the lowest, that of a servant. He became obedient unto death on the Cross. The pain of God's love goes that far. It runs that deep. We hear it in Jesus identifying himself with us. Martin Luther heard it. As a young man he wanted to be a lawyer. One day he was nearly struck by lightning-and decided to become a monk. But he lived a life of fear. Then he taught a course on the Psalms at Wittenberg University. As he was preparing a lecture, he came to Psalm 22- "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was captivated by those words. He realized that by going to the cross, Jesus, in his God-forsaken-ness, had taken upon himself the sin, the sorrow, the suffering, the fear, the frustration of Martin Luther and every other person. And for the first time Martin Luther found faith. We hear the pain of God's love when Jesus says, "I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly." When he says, "The son of Man will be delivered into the hands of his enemies." When Jesus prays in the garden, "let this cup pass from me..." When he screams from the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

It is a word we must hear- the word of his identification with us- for it is the Word of life. It is the word, the liberating word, we must hear to be set free. He became like us so that he could take our suffering upon himself. And with his suffering, his defeat, he allows us to see there is a victory- a victory which comes only through defeat.

Third, we feel the pain of love in imitation. This compassion God has for his creation-this pain of love we find in Jesus Christ, which he had for all sorts of people- is not only something to be seen and heard by us, we are called to feel this pain in our hearts. We are called to be people of compassion. Saint Paul said, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." Much of our world today is unfeeling, uncaring, unconcerned. If we call ourselves Christians, if God has laid his hand on us, if Jesus has claimed our allegiance, then we simply cannot be like the rest of the world. God has called us to care, to have compassion, to feel the pain of love in our hearts. God has called us to share the love we have received.

E. Stanley Jones told about a man who went to his back door and found a dog with a hurt leg. He took the dog in, bandaged the leg, and fed him for several days. When the dog was well again, he let him out and the dog ran off. The man was disappointed that the dog had no appreciation for what he had done. But the next day he looked out and there was the dog again- and this time he had with him another dog with a hurt leg. That is what we are called to do- bring someone else, share with someone what we have received, feel the pain of love in our hearts. But even as we do this there is the danger that our compassion takes on the form of mere pity.

There is a story of the Dutch Governor General of Java. He was complaining because the people wanted the Dutch to leave. He told a companion, "Look what we have done for them." He listed the schools, hospitals, elimination of disease, honest government, peace, roads, railroads, and industry. He said, "Yet they want us to

go. Can you tell me why they want us to go?" His friend replied, "I'm afraid it is because you've never had the right look in your eyes when you spoke to the." Perhaps it was the look of pity- or disdain, or revulsion, but it was not the look of compassion. Jesus had the look of compassion.

Matthew said, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them." Then, Jesus said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out the laborers into his harvest." Jesus Christ is calling us to be that – the people of compassion, people who feel the pain of love on our hearts.

For many years Anton Lang played the part of Christ in the passion play at Oberammergau. One day a friend was looking around the set. He saw the Cross, and tried to pick it up. He thought it would have been a fake cross. But it was made of real timbers. He said, "Why is it so heavy? How do you carry that cross?" Lang answered, "If I did not feel the weight of his cross, I could not play his part."

**COMPASSION IS SOMETHING WE CANNOT FAKE. NO PLAY-ACTING WILL DO, FOR THE STAKES ARE HIGH, THE TIMES ARE DANGEROUS, AND GOD NEEDS A PEOPLE TO BE LIKE HIM.**