

Sermon Notes | Refugee Week (17-24 June) | Compassion

Suggested Hymns/Songs

The Lord is gracious and compassionate

<https://www.music-ministry.org/hymns/the-lord-is-gracious-and-compassionate/>

Amazing Grace (My chains are gone) - Chris Tomlin

<https://www.praisecharts.com/songs/details/2517/amazing-grace-my-chains-are-gone-sheet-music/chords>

Mighty to save

<https://www.music-ministry.org/hymns/mighty-to-save/>

The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness - Exodus 34:6

For Refugee Week's 25th anniversary (17-24th June 2024) we are all invited to celebrate what compassion looks like in action. For Christians, the word compassion has a special meaning because it is a word that God uses to describe himself. In Exodus we are told the Lord comes down in a cloud and passes in front of Moses and proclaims: 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.' (Exodus 34:6)

But what does this word compassion actually mean? Coming from the Hebrew word 'Rakhum', meaning 'deeply moved', it is a word used to describe how God is moved by his love and concern for his people and it is this powerful compassion that prompts Him to take action to help them. The word 'rakhum' is used when the Israelites were slaves to the Egyptians, and call out to God, who is 'deeply moved' by their plight and acts to rescue them. The word is also used when the Israelites are wandering hungry and thirsty in the wilderness and again God is 'deeply moved' by his love for them and provides everything that they need - food, water and even clothing. Similarly in the gospels, just before Jesus feeds the hungry or heals the sick we are told He is 'deeply moved'. Demonstrating that it is His compassion for

people that prompts Him to take action, to love, to heal, even to rescue us by dying for us on the cross.

And in response to this incredible love and compassion, Jesus asked each of his disciples to follow His example and **'Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate.'** (Luke 6:36)

And we too are asked to lead lives of compassion. We are reminded that to follow Christ, requires us to share what we have and demonstrate our love in actions and in truth. **'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth.'** (1 John 3:18).

We are told it is not enough to just have sympathy for others when we are faced with a tough situation. Instead we are required to be like the Samaritan whose compassion for his enemy prompted him to willingly take the risk and the cost that came with bandaging the man's wounds, taking care of him, and getting him the help he needs.

This can seem an overwhelming challenge. Every day there are headlines about the 'swarm' of 'illegal immigrants' and we are told by the UK government that we need to create a hostile environment to prevent us from being overwhelmed. That the only way to solve these problems is to detain people in inhumane conditions until they are forced to return back where they came from. The truth though, is that the UK is home to only 1% of the people who are forcibly displaced from their homes. In fact, over half of the people who are forced to flee are actually internally displaced within their original country, and 72% of the remainder settle in neighbouring countries. The tiny number of those who do make the difficult and often dangerous journey to the UK, come here because they have family members here or they speak a little of the language so hope that it will be easier for them to get a job and work to support themselves and their families. They want to

work, they want to contribute (and in countries where they are allowed to work this has proven to greatly benefit the local economy), they simply want a safe place to call home, just like the rest of us.

It is also untrue that those moving here are 'illegal', it is recognised in the 1951 Convention that people fleeing persecution may have to use irregular means in order to escape and claim asylum in another country – and there is no legal way to travel to the UK for the specific purpose of seeking asylum. Nor is it true that most people are telling lies about their need for safety. The UK asylum system is renowned for being complex and difficult to navigate, and yet, 76% of initial decisions resulted in a grant of asylum or other form of protection. And whilst it is extremely difficult to provide the evidence required to be granted protection when you have to leave your country quickly and friends and family members are also forced to flee, time and time again we have seen that the people who are initially refused will themselves eventually be granted status if they are supported to get legal support and interpretation, though this can be a long, arduous and often traumatic process. Where they are forced to exist on less than £7 a day for everything and so often end up living on the streets or in other dangerous situations.

But Jesus reminds us that we are to 'love one another, just as I have loved you' and that 'whatever you do for one of the least of these you do for me.' To love someone, you need to listen to them and get to know them. So at the Boaz Trust, a Manchester based Christian charity, we believe that the first step to loving the people who find themselves homeless and destitute due to the broken asylum system, is to offer safe and secure shelter in one of our shared houses and listen to them, and then support them as they start to rebuild their lives. And by listening to people, we can ensure that the support we offer them really helps them to tackle the challenges they face.

Tolla* (*name changed), who was previously supported by Boaz, says: 'I didn't think anyone in this country cared for me until I came to Boaz. Many organisations say they will help...but really they don't help as much as Boaz. You have given me a house, wifi, access to a gym and transport when I have appointments. You treat me like my family back home. Money is money but you can't do anything without love. Thank you.'

So this Refugee Week, let's all look at how we can widen our circles of compassion, firstly by listening and then by actively taking steps to help others to move forward with their lives. One way you can do this is by joining the Boaz Trust for 'Family night' this June in Hulme (details on our website). This is a special night of socialising, shared food and stories with Boaz residents (past and present), fellow supporters of Boaz and staff members, enabling us to each share our experiences and look at what steps we can each take, and encourage those in power to take, to create a more welcoming and compassionate society. It's a really inspiring evening and I do hope many of you will be able to join us.

I also encourage each of you to take one of our special leaflets and prayerfully consider whether there is anyone who you might share it with. Inside there is more information about the Boaz Trust, a QR code that shows a video of one woman's experience of being destitute and the difference a safe, secure home and the support of Boaz has made for her, and the opportunity to sign up to our newsletters and prayer emails or to give a small gift to support this vital work. So often we are faced with the challenges of being a welcoming community, here is an opportunity to share some of the hope and possibilities which being part of a compassionate community offers.

Finally, I invite you to join with me to pray together:

Almighty and merciful God,

whose Son became a refugee and had no place to call his own;

look with mercy on those who today are fleeing from danger,

homeless and hungry.

Bless those who work to bring them relief;

inspire generosity and compassion in all our hearts;

and guide the nations of the world towards that day when all will rejoice in your Kingdom of justice and of peace;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen