

Series: Compassion; The Family Business
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Edgar King
Compassion, Nakuru
Matthew 21:28-31

Trinity Vineyard officially opened its doors in February of 2015. So we are turning 5 this year. And it has been a great journey. Not without its heartaches. Some great hellos and hard goodbyes have been said here. We have seen God draw many people to him. We have had great stories of healing and we have some sad stories too.

The beautiful knitting of different cultures we see here every day. That Kenyans from all cultural and church backgrounds can call this home has been a good thing to see unfold. That people from all across the world can call this home, has been a great thing to watch. Some for a longer season than others. I often say this is a small taste of heaven, where every tongue tribe and nation is gathered before God.

We are honoured to be invited by God to be part of what he is doing in this city. As we started back up for 2020 I was thinking about a lot about what leading this church faithfully means. Had a lot of conversations with some other pastors around and just catching up and I remember praying, God, Nakuru needs this church.

And not in a corky way. I actually believe that Nakuru needs the other churches alongside which we work really. Yet I think there is a special assignment for us and we are called to be faithful. I meet some of you and I see that this has been a place of hope, life and renewal and I am ready to once again be part of what God is doing in the city. We are called to bring life to the city of Nakuru. We are called to love our city. How do we do that? What is God doing?

Have you heard stories of bosses who care more about their machinery than their employees? Say one of their drivers gets into an accident, they ask about the care before they ask about the person?

Had a meeting with the bonfire team and one of them fell from the chair and I said, "as soon as you tell us you are okay please check on the chair" Just so that no one could accuse me of caring for our furniture more than people.

You see really, how much you love or care about someone is determined by your response to them during their time of weakness. How much we love our city is really about is measured by how we reposed to the least of these, to the suffering ones, to the forgotten ones.

Bryan Stevenson said, "The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated and the condemned."

The true measure of the character of the church of Jesus is in his response to suffering. The true measure of how much Trinity loves its city is in our response to the hungry and the needy and the poor and the downtrodden.

Let's Pray

Nowadays, for a lot of people, the first thing to do when one wakes up in the morning is to take your phone and look up social media. And you do not have to scroll too far out into your newsfeed on Facebook to get some really bad news. There is suffering everywhere. These

days, Facebook will seek your consent to show really bad pictorials of suffering. Of course, there is good news too, but unfortunately, that often does not sell so you see it less often.

Meeting a family of four who can barely afford meals and are living in a house that floods anytime it rains tells me there is something wrong with the world. Going into town on Monday and realising that some people slept on those pavements homeless and jobless says it all. Remembering as a child when I played around the municipal dumpsite and heard the cry of a baby who had been dumped from birth says it all. Something is wrong with the world

I read a story of a pastor fresh out of seminary going to one of those churches where the leader greets people by saying “May the Lord be with you” and they reply “And also with you”

He found that the microphone was not working. He tried tapping it and finally said out loud.

“Something is wrong with it”

And the crowd was heard replying, “And also with you!”

It does not take long to realise that something is not only wrong with the world, but also with you. Also with me! Some people have hurt because I did not act when they needed me to and some people have hurt because I acted in a way that I should not have.

You have not always spoken kindly or acted kindly. In my shortlist of the casques of suffering I’m included the wickedness of human beings and I guess in some ways we all have been those people. In some ways, we have been the cause of the pain. Sometimes we have been the reason why some have seen that something is wrong in our city and our world.

Something is wrong with the world, and also with you.

If you have ever wondered what God thinks about something or how God would act in any situation you look at the life of Jesus. I am learning that one of the favourite verses for my friend George is the one that describes Jesus as the spitting image of the invisible God.

One day, Jesus was with his disciples and he had obviously taught them much and shown them much and he spoke about his coming death. And he said to his disciples that he was going to the father. And one of them in a very special moment of wisdom said,

“Show us the father”

And I can imagine Jesus looking at him with a smile and a lot of compassion as he said, “You have already seen him. Because if you have seen him you have seen the father”

Almost like Jesus was saying, don’t you get it? All this time? But quite compassionately.

If you ever want to know what moves the heart of God. If you ever want to know how God feels about all that is wrong with our city and the world, you look at Jesus.

As some of his friends tell the story of his life one they keep using one word over and over again, compassion... A blind person is brought to Jesus and he is filled with compassion and he heals him.

Jesus sees a funeral procession and Jesus is filled with compassion, he stops the procession and raises the child from the dead.

And picture all that planning that goes into preparing to bury someone. You have had family meetings, you have raised money to cover the cost. It is usually on the actual day of the burial that the truth of that loss hits home. Jesus saw the pain the family had he was filled with compassion and he healed raised the young boy. There is a joy that comes and also the question of, well, what do we do with all these burial stuff we bought?

There is another story of Jesus going about his business and a respectable person comes to him and asks for mercy because his only daughter, a 12-year-old girl, was so sick and close to dying. Jesus cancels his schedule for the day and starts going to this man's house to heal the daughter. He has heard of her pain and seen his agony and he was moved by compassion.

Jesus, quite a popular teacher with so many crowds following him. One day there was a large crowd that had followed him listening to his teaching and he notices that they had not eaten because they had not left his side for days. Unlike popular teachers of today who then ask for money to buy a new jet with the claim that they need to be able to comfortably go teach in the next big venue, Jesus is moved by compassion for the hungry listeners and feeds them.

Jesus revealed the heart and character of God by moving towards sinful humanity, by moving to the leper and the widowed and the ashamed, and the weak. Jesus always moved by compassion.

If we are going to love our city, we will be drawn to join God in what he is doing and it seems that every time God sees the world, his creation, he is moved by compassion. He was doing what he saw his father do and saying what he heard his father say. He was joining God in his business and it seems that God was constantly being moved by compassion. Compassion is the character of God, it is God's business.

And the word translated into compassion is more than just pity or sympathy. That is what we feel when we see news of suffering on Facebook and in the news. But this was more than a feeling. It is a deep gut feeling equivalent to what a parent feels for their children that swings them to action.

I have always liked the phrase, 'the God who feels pain. Many cultures, in our broken views of God, often represent God as this distant mighty being who could not be moved by the plight of the orphaned child, the widowed person, the downtrodden economically, the spiritually oppressed and the one lost in sin.

But in Jesus, we see a very different picture of the character of God. We see God deeply moved by the pain of his people that it moves him to action. And that has always been the invitation of Jesus to the church.

There is a story Jesus told that I want us to read today, there were 2 sons and their father and he used it to describe two different responses to the invitation God gives to join him in his work

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

“I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

“Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

Matthew 21:28-31

Okay, let's get into that story. And it is always important to ask ourselves what the people hearing Jesus' story were actually hearing. Because otherwise, we may miss out on the weight of what Jesus said to them.

At face value, it looks like a parent has asked two of his children to do some chores and one refuses and another agrees. But it is not quite like that. It is a bit more.

You have heard of people with names like Taylor, Shepherd, Smith. At some point in human history, your name reflected your trade and mostly the trade would be passed down the family. Yet this story was dating a bit further than that.

A closer example is a family of doctors that expects every child to be a doctor. Then one kid gets to university and says they want to study music and art. It's inconceivable to the parents. “What do you mean study music. In this family, we are all doctors. I bought you a lab coat the day you were born” That would be almost a close equivalent.

In this culture, it went without saying that your father was your employer. We actually expect that Jesus worked with his father as a carpenter for a time. It is just how it works. So when. Father says go work in the Vineyard and the first son says no, this was an insult to the father.

The first son was technically saying that he is disowning the family. He does not want to be part of the family, nor does he want to be like them or identified with them. So when people are hearing this story they are thinking, that young man is possessed. In African culture, all the feelings that go with disrespecting a parent, that is what is going through their mind. In a strange way, there is a feeling that when a child dishonours their parent's things will not go well for them.

And of course, there is the other son. There is a Swahili proverb that says “*cha mwenzako kikinyolewa tia chako maji*” which translates to when you see your friend getting shaved, wet your won head, you are next.

Have you ever realized how good one kid gets when they see the trouble the other one has just gotten into?

So the second son even overplays his respect for his dad. He calls him sir. And promises that he will do it.

Jesus would make up these stories to give us in a language we understand a picture of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. So there will always be in the story a character that represents God and one that represents us.

And in this story, the father represents God. And we are either of the two sons. So what is God's Vineyard? I promise it is not a promo for Trinity Vineyard and yet this is God's Vineyard too. The Vineyard is God's World. His creation, our city of Nakuru. And the work on the Vineyard, the family business is one of compassion.

He has looked at the world and he has so loved the world and it needs to be worked on. Just like us, God sees that there is something wrong with the world and also with me. And so he is moved by compassion into action. Jesus and the father are in the business of showing compassion to the lost, the hungry, the broken, the prisoner, the falsely accused and the one to blame. The sick, the orphan.

And God asks us, hey will you go and be in my business? Will you love your city? Will you have compassion on the sinner, the broken, the hurting and the weary?

One child is the ultimate rebellious child. Think about the most rebellious people you know. You probably do not even like them. They are the prostitutes and the tax collectors of our world. You have a few in your mind? Yes them. They have said to God that they do not identify with him and want nothing to do with God's business. They have rejected the church and walked away.

But as they walk away they see the father's Vineyard and their heart is moved and they stop in their tracks handiwork in the Vineyard. As they walk away they see the injustice in the world, they see the orphan and the hungry and the poor and the widowed and the old and the rejected and they are moved by compassion into action.

And of course, there is the good child. They talk right. They pray right. They know all the best names for God. They do not drink much, they go to church every week. They switch on the news on the news and they see how broken the world is and they have the good son reaction. But they do not do anything.

All they say is sure, there is something wrong in the world. All they say is our thoughts and prayer are with them. All they say is oh poor child, oh poor family. And they share the video on WhatsApp and Facebook and they write how sad it is that people go hungry and children go without school and orphans are left unattended. They share and share on Facebook and even talk about how God will come and rescue us from all the suffering but they will not dare lift a finger to do anything.

So Jesus asks, which of the two children was obedient?

Reminds me of a story I saw online of a girl's parents giving thanks to God for answering her prayers. She had been praying that there would be provision for her daughter's school fees. And there was a self-proclaimed atheist who went ahead and paid her daughter's fees.

And I wonder how many believers may have met this lady and all they said was, "I will pray for you?"

So Jesus asks them the same question he asks us, "Who was the more obedient child?"

The business of our father is a business of compassion. Allowing our heart to be moved by the world around us. When we see those lost in sin when we see those broken by the world. Suffering because of the wickedness of humanity and the oppression of the enemy, God was always moved by compassion to action. Will you work in the father's Vineyard? How can we not be moved?

Let's pray