

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Luke 1:1-4 4:14-21**

There are two steps to compassion. The first is human; the second is Christian. Both are important because one builds upon the other.

I don't know how many of you know about archeology. But archeology is the science of trying to understand the past through the remnants that have been left down to us by past generations.

Archeologists excavate ancient sites and then, by the artifacts that they pull out of the ground, they seek to construct an earlier history.

In the twentieth century one of the greatest American archeologists was a woman by the name of Margaret Mead. Once in an interview she was asked what she would consider the earliest archeological evidence of human civilization.

The interviewer wanted to know what was the first sign that humanity had moved beyond the level of mere animals and had developed a higher level of consciousness.

The person who posed the question gave Mead a few suggestions. He said, "Would you consider an arrowhead, or a fish hook as the first sign of civilization; or would you go for a more sophisticated artifact such as a musical instrument or a ceramic bowl?"

Mead said, "I would point to none of those things. For me the earliest artifact that points to human civilization is a healed human femur."

Now the femur is the largest bone in the body. It is the bone of the upper leg. Mead went on to explain that in the ancient world it was the survival of the fittest.

If you broke your femur, it was certain death. You could no longer walk nor could you gather food to feed yourself. So, Mead continued, “The discovery of a healed human femur meant that somebody had cared for the person whose leg was broken.

Somebody protected him and brought food to him in order that his leg might heal.” For Mead, a healed human femur is the earliest archeological evidence of civilization, because it is evidence of human **compassion**. It is evidence of one person caring for another who cannot care for him or herself.

Now compassion remains a common sign of our humanity. Just look at the outpouring of concern and support that the world is showing the victims of the natural disasters in North Carolina and California.

That support comes from all different people of all different backgrounds, of all different religions, and even some who have no religion at all.

They reach out to help because they understand that this is the basic obligation of being human. Christians of course participate fully on this level of compassion. As part of the human race, we know our basic responsibility is to care for others.

Yet, for Christians there is a second step to compassion, a step that is made clear by Jesus in today’s gospel. When Jesus was looking for a description of his mission, he turned to the prophet Isaiah and found that scripture citation that we just heard.

It is a beautiful list of acts of compassion to others: to announce good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed.

These are all humane acts that every human would recognize as our responsibility each other. But the prophet Isaiah adds a second step to compassion.

It is the assertion that God is involved in our acts of compassion to one another. For the passage begins: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. God has anointed me to bring news to the poor. For Isaiah, for Jesus, and for us, it is clear that our acts of compassion are connected to God.

We believe that God is at work in our world and in our lives moving us away from evil and towards good. We also believe that when we do acts of compassion for others, God uses those actions as part of God’s larger purpose.

This is the second step of compassion: to believe that our kindness to others is taken by God and used by God to move the world to a better place.

Thus Christians do not help the victims of natural disasters simply because it is the human thing to do. It certainly is. But we also believe that God will use our prayers and our contributions as part of a larger plan—to bring about God’s Kingdom.

To say this in another way: Christians believe that human goodness is not the only goodness in the world. Our goodness is taken up by God and made a part of God’s goodness.

God uses our acts of compassion in ways that we cannot always explain or predict. Therefore, Christians believe that every act of compassion is valuable, and that there is no act of kindness that is wasted.

Even if our action does not seem to have an effect, God somehow uses our efforts for His purposes. For this reason, we as Christians should have more confidence and more energy for doing good than anyone else.

We should be more motivated to forgive our spouse, to be patient with our children, to be generous to our co-workers, to be motivated to help those in need because we are convinced that our efforts, as small as they are, are taken up by God and used to build the Kingdom.

Having compassion on others is what makes us human. Believing that our acts of compassion are used by God to save the world is what makes us Christian.

We need both of these steps of compassion to be true followers of Jesus. AMEN!