

# Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

## SERMON FOR

December 6, 2015

*“The Compassion of the Christ”*



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister  
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## ***Menifee United Church of Christ***

*Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM*

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***Following Jesus***

**Luke 3:1-6**

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."'*

**Philippians 1:3-8**

*I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.*

***The Compassion of the Christ***

Humankind should be all about compassion. It's right there in the word: Human. Kind. But people have different views of compassion.

A rich man was riding in his limo when he saw a man along the side of the road eating grass. The rich man was disturbed by that, so he had his driver stop, and he got out to investigate. The rich man asked the man, "Why are you eating grass?" The man said, "Well, I'm poor and I don't have any money for food. So I have to eat grass." The rich man had compassion for the poor man. The rich man said, "Come with me to my mansion and I'll feed you." The poor man said, "Thank you, Sir." The rich man and the poor man got into the limo and headed for the mansion. On the way, the poor man said to the rich man, "Sir, you are truly kind and filled with compassion. Thank you for taking me with you to your mansion." The rich man said, "No problem, I'm happy to do it." Then the rich man said, "You'll really love my mansion. The grass there is almost a foot high."

Albert Schweitzer has a different view of compassion than that rich man. Albert Schweitzer, the medical missionary to Africa, a Lutheran, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952 for his philosophy of "Reverence for Life," says, "The purpose of human life is to serve, and to show compassion and the will to help others."

The Dalai Lama also has a different view of compassion than that rich man. The Dalai Lama, the leader of Tibetan Buddhism, says, "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

What's your view of compassion? This is a United Church of Christ church, where we don't ask you to leave your brain at the door. So you're free to come up with your own view of compassion. And I'm a United Church of Christ minister. So I'm free to come up with my own view of compassion. So, what is our view of compassion?

The Bible is where many of us turn to to understand compassion. And compassion is found throughout the Bible. Especially in the Christian New Testament.

Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, tells the people of Philippi that he prays for them. He also tells them that he longs for them, “with the compassion of Christ Jesus.” What is the compassion of Christ Jesus?

Luke describes how John the Baptist is, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness.” John is crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for Jesus. John says, “Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places shall be made smooth; and the salvation of God shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.” John is saying that Jesus is the salvation of God. And the salvation of God is the compassion of Christ Jesus.

Matthew tells us what the compassion of Christ Jesus looks like. You’ve heard me refer to this passage many times, because it sums up the compassion of Christ Jesus. Jesus says, “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me...Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

If more Christians would follow Jesus, would follow the teachings of Jesus, would follow the compassion of Christ Jesus, the world would be a much better place. But many Christians get side-tracked; from following Jesus, to only worshipping Jesus.

Hollywood has a tendency to present Jesus more as someone to be worshiped, and less as someone to be followed.

Mel Gibson, about ten years ago, made a movie, “The Passion of the Christ.” It was a grizzly account of the torture and crucifixion of Jesus. I cried watching it. Maybe you did, too. The thing I didn’t like about that movie, in addition to seeing Jesus die a horrible death (not to mention that the movie made Jesus look like a Hollywood hunk, like Mel Gibson; and as I’ve

said before in a sermon, given the fact that he was Jewish 2,000 years ago, chances are that Jesus looked less like Mel Gibson and more like Mel Brooks), anyway, the thing I didn't like about that movie, was the focus on what some people see as the most important part of Jesus' life: Jesus' death.

Jesus did not live just to die. I've preached this before, too, but it bears re-preaching. Some think Jesus lived just to die - for people's sins, to be resurrected, to sit at the right hand of God. But if Jesus lived just to die, why would an angel tell Joseph to take young Jesus and flee to Egypt, so Herod's henchmen wouldn't kill him? Why not just let him die - for people's sins, to be resurrected, to sit at the right hand of God? The answer is simple: None of us lives just to die. So Jesus' death was not the most important part of Jesus' life.

Jesus' life was the most important part of Jesus' life. Not his birth, which was important, and which we celebrate in a few weeks; but we're all born. And not his death, which was important, and which we commemorate in a few months; but we all die. Jesus' life was the most important part of Jesus' life. His loving, compassionate, justice-seeking life. So rather than "The Passion of the Christ," I wish Mel Gibson would have made, "The Compassion of the Christ."

Maybe Hollywood figures that would be a boring movie. Jesus speaking out and acting out of love for one another? Boring! But I'd buy a ticket (you know, and popcorn, root beer, and Milk Duds).

Maybe it would be boring, to make and watch a movie about the compassion of the Christ. But showing the compassion of the Christ is the "boring" life we as Christians are called to: To follow Jesus - speaking out and acting out of love for one another. And many do that.

A member of our congregation went in the hospital recently. Members of this congregation visited him in the hospital, just as

Jesus says to, “I was sick and you took care of me.” He was thrilled by the visits and is now recovering from surgery. Those members of this congregation who visited him were showing that hospitalized member: The compassion of the Christ.

A member of our congregation was in jail recently. Members of this congregation visited him in jail, just as Jesus says to, “I was in prison and you visited me.” He was thrilled by the visit, is out of jail now, and is trying to get his life back on track. Those members of this congregation who visited him were showing that jailed member: The compassion of the Christ.

A member of our community was barefoot, and in need of shoes, and hungry, and in need of food, recently. A member of this congregation gave her sandals from our Clothing Closet and a bag of food from our Food Pantry, just as Jesus says to, “I was hungry and you gave me food...I was naked and you gave me clothing.” That woman was thrilled by the help. That member of this congregation who helped her was showing that woman in need: The compassion of the Christ.

This is the Christmas season, when you’d expect to see people show the compassion of the Christ. And you do see it in a lot of different places at this time of year. But the compassion of the Christ, shown by members of this congregation, goes on all year long.

Christmas carols tell us all about: The compassion of the Christ. We just have to listen to them closely.

“O Little Town Of Bethlehem,” a Christmas carol we sang a few moments ago, tells us where love comes from. “So God imparts to human hearts the glorious love of heaven.” “The glorious love of heaven” can be translated: The compassion of the Christ.

“Joy To The World,” a Christmas carol we’ll sing a few moments from now, tells us all about how Jesus acts on earth. “Christ rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove: The glories of God’s righteousness and wonders of God’s

love.” The “wonders of God’s love” can be translated: The compassion of the Christ.

Christianity is not a spectator sport. You may be sitting in the pews, but you’re not sitting in the stands, watching life go by. If you’re going to be a Christian, as much as you are able, you have to engage your mind, body, and spirit in following Jesus: In speaking out and acting out of love for one another. And when you do that, you’re living: The compassion of the Christ.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,  
Help us to speak out of love for one another.  
Help us to act out of love for one another.  
And help us to live: The compassion of the Christ.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*

## THE GOLDEN RULE

*Do to others what you would  
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*What is hateful to you  
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*None of you believes until he wishes for his  
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others  
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself  
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others  
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people  
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism