

Education Reflection on compassion, healing and inclusion.

Compassion and inclusion are defining qualities of Jesus' ministry. Right from his birth in a harsh winter's stable it is the shepherds who come to see him first, not the wealthy or powerful, the religious or political leaders. As soon as Jesus begins his public ministry, he seeks out the sick, the vulnerable, the outcasts. He embraces all those who challenge the status quo: the lepers and tax collectors, the children and women, the grieving and possessed, the disabled and poor. He welcomes everyone to his table with love and grace.

In our readings today from the prophet Isaiah, the Gospel of Mark and the Letter of James there are three golden threads: compassion, healing and inclusion.

God has compassion for those who are suffering and *'He will come and save you.'*

This physical healing is up to God but when it happens:

⁵ *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;*

⁶ *then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.'*

Isaiah 35:5-7

When Jesus heals the deaf man in Mark 7:31-37 he heals in the name of God as he looks up to heaven while touching the man so that *'... his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.'* Each miracle that Jesus performs addresses a serious human and spiritual need and is always accompanied by a serious message about Jesus' identity and authority from God. These people's return to health was essential if they were to rejoin society and practice their faith before God in community since their conditions excluded them from public worship and social relationships.

Healing operates at different levels. Not everyone is transformed physically. But spiritually through a different relationship with Christ, their suffering is given meaning and a hope that it will not last forever. In this way, Jesus, whose own suffering on the cross accompanies and redeems our own struggles, ensures that God's promise of a new Kingdom is within our reach.

This counter-cultural attitude reverses many of the challenges that the world presents us with today. It models compassion, healing and inclusion. Everyone should have the same rights: to live well, to have equal access to resources to fulfil their potential, to be respected and not judged by superficial appearances or criteria, or to be defined only by certain skills. We are all beautiful, not because of our looks, gifts, health, wealth or success but because we are created in God's image. No matter how wounded or troubled we are, there is redemption to be found since: *'... has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.'*

James 2:1-5

Part of the point of the miracles Jesus performs is to help the people move from individual self-concern to a new shared sense of solidarity. We are responsible for each other. In that collective care, our schools can help us to value one another in all our glorious diversity. And living compassionately each day, enabling spiritual healing and real inclusion.

Questions for discussion

Where do we need to show compassion and healing in our schools?

How best can we model inclusion in our schools?

Who needs our prayers for compassion, healing or inclusion this week?

How do we guard against exclusion at school, at home and in our communities?

Suggested Music for listening to or singing

Bread for the world, Bernadette Farrell.1990.

Fleur Dorrell.