



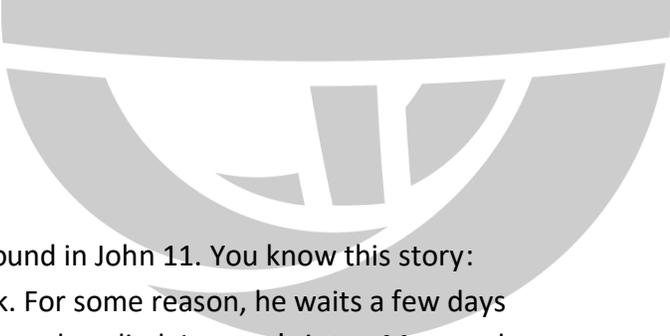
Sunday, Feb. 7, 2021  
*Sermon Series: Love in Action*

Love Mends Broken Hearts  
Pastor Shelley Cunningham

### Luke 7:1-17 NRSV

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup>A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. <sup>3</sup>When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. <sup>4</sup>When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, <sup>5</sup>for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." <sup>6</sup>And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; <sup>7</sup>therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. <sup>8</sup>For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." <sup>9</sup>When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." <sup>10</sup>When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

<sup>11</sup>Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. <sup>12</sup>As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. <sup>13</sup>When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." <sup>14</sup>Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" <sup>15</sup>The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. <sup>16</sup>Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" <sup>17</sup>This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.



One of the most powerful scenes in the gospels is found in John 11. You know this story: word comes to Jesus that his dear friend Lazarus is very sick. For some reason, he waits a few days before heading to Lazarus' side. By the time he arrives, Lazarus has died. Lazarus' sisters Mary and Martha are beside themselves with grief. Why did Jesus not come? If he had been there, he could have done something – offered healing, or prayers, or comfort. It's a breathtaking accusation, brave and raw. They needed him, and he let them down. Jesus listens, but, it seems, remains unmoved. The women take Jesus to Lazarus' tomb. People are gathered around, wailing and keening. Finally, in the face of so much grief, Jesus is overcome with emotion. We read it in John 11:35, the shortest verse in the Bible: *Jesus wept.*

Martin Luther called John 3:16 “the gospel in miniature,” but I've often thought John 11:35 is a close second. That simple sentence conveys that God's only begotten Son truly understood the pain of heartbreak. He had a visceral response: tears running down his face, sobs wracking his chest. Jesus didn't just cry. Jesus wept.

In today's gospel from Luke 7, we hear two more stories of human emotion, though the humans in question couldn't be any more different: Gentile and Jew, male and female, wealthy and poor, powerful and on the margins. And though Jesus ultimately helps both people, his response to them is different, too.

Now, how you understand God might make a difference in how you're affected by these stories.

You might be wired to think God pays attention to those who deserve it. People who are kind, or faithful, or generous, like the Roman centurion. That certainly seems to be the argument the Jewish elders are making on his behalf. *Rabbi, this man may not be one of us, but he has done so much for our people. Surely he's worth a few minutes of your time.* Their words are persuasive. And though Jesus doesn't even actually speak with the centurion, he marvels at his faith and the centurion's servant is healed.

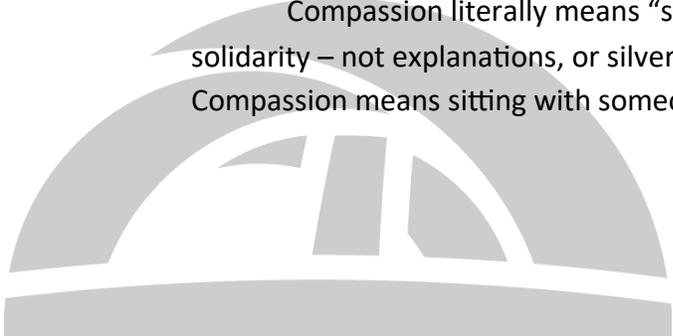
Or maybe you think that God pays attention to people who are need it most. People who've had more than their share of hardship, or who can't seem to catch a break, like the woman from Nain. She's already lost her husband; now she's about to bury her only son – her hope for the future. Surely, the Jesus whose heart was laid bare at Lazarus' tomb would be moved to tears at her plight.

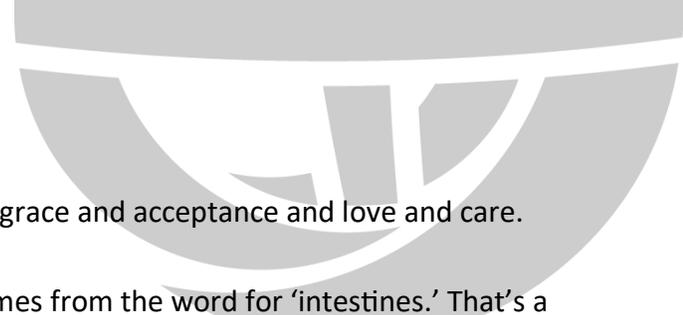
And yet, that's not the reaction we see from Jesus in the text. Jesus, who wept with Mary and Martha at Lazarus' grave, here says to the woman, “Do not weep.” Why?

It may seem like an odd response, but back up a few words. Luke writes that Jesus had compassion on her.

Compassion literally means “suffering with.” It means seeing another person. Expressing solidarity – not explanations, or silver linings, or your own relevant story – just solidarity.

Compassion means sitting with someone in their pain. Making room in your own heart for some of





their hurt and holding it gently, tenderly, with the utmost grace and acceptance and love and care. Jesus has compassion.

The Greek word Luke uses is *spagchnizomai*. It comes from the word for ‘intestines.’ That’s a clue. *Splachnizomai* – compassion – is a deep feeling in your gut, connected to the very core of your being.

In the gospel of Luke the word “compassion” shows up three times – here, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and in the parable of the Prodigal Son. And in each instance one person experiences the suffering of another and then does something to walk with them in it. Jesus raises the widow’s son from the dead. The Samaritan cares for a robbed and injured man. The father rushes out to his lost son and welcomes him home.

These are all gut-wrenching actions. They affect the recipient and the actor. Both are connected. Both are changed.

So when we read that Jesus has compassion, it is more than a look of pity. Jesus’ heart is drawn in to her situation. He feels her pain deep inside. And his words, “Do not weep,” become more than platitude; they become a promise.

They are a promise because Jesus speaks then. And Jesus is able to speak these words because he – and only he -- is able to mend her broken heart.

Friends, what we see of Jesus in Luke – the theme for this series – is love in action. Not love as feeling. Love as deed. Love that shows up through tiny acts of kindness, through truth-telling, through forgiveness, through accompaniment. Love that shows up whenever we do something to sit with the pain of another and then walk with them in it: Make a call, send a card, share a gift, wear a mask. Compassion shows up when we honor the experience of others, and listen, and see them.

Professor Michal Beth Drinker writes that, “compassion arises when life meets death, when hope and suffering come together.”

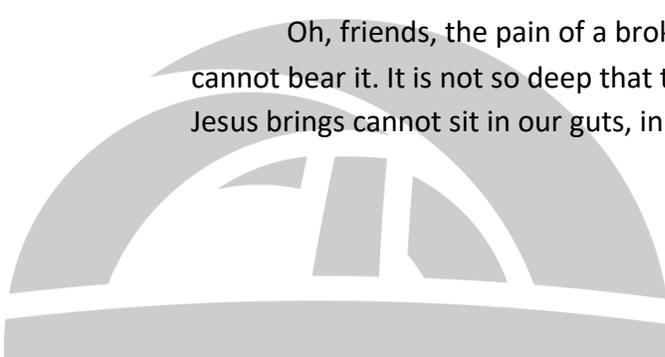
It’s at that moment when our fragile humanity is laid bare, when we are nothing more than sighs and moans and tears. At that moment, God steps in. When we feel we cannot go another day, cannot take another breath on our own, God by the mystery of creation fills our lungs with life-giving air. God by the mastery of the heavens brings dawn after darkness. And at that intersection of life and death, of hope and suffering, Jesus is there, holding it all together. Holding us all together.

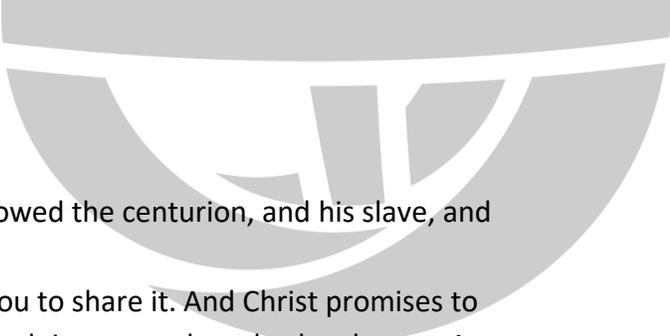
My friends, how have you experienced compassion lately? This time where you knew that because of the actions of another person, Christ was with you; sharing in your pain, walking with you through it.

How, my friends, have you shared that compassion with another? We have experienced a tremendous amount of loss this past year – as people, as a nation, as a global community.

If there was ever a time when we needed to feel and to share this compassion, it is now.

Oh, friends, the pain of a broken heart is very very real. But it is not so great that Christ cannot bear it. It is not so deep that the cross cannot reach it. It is not so dark that the light that Jesus brings cannot sit in our guts, in our hearts, and flicker with hope. Because we know, we know





that the compassionate love and grace and mercy Jesus showed the centurion, and his slave, and the widow, and her son, is what he shows to us.

My friends, the world needs compassion. It needs you to share it. And Christ promises to help you put that compassionate love into action, and through it, to mend our broken hearts. Amen.

