Matthew 25:31-40 April 29, 2018

***Compassion Sunday***

*Stewards for Life – Part 2*

*How Are the Children?*

Rev. Meagan Boozer

Ten days ago, five of us from the congregation attended the annual fundraising banquet for NETwork Ministries. The ‘NET’ in NETwork stands for *Nurturing Eternal Truth*. This is a ministry to at-risk children in Chambersburg, primarily in the south end of town. NETwork is celebrating 25 years of ministry, and for this special anniversary fund-raising banquet they asked Rev. Don Baker to speak. Currently Don is the executive pastor at King Street Church. He has spoken here several times over the years – a fabulous preacher and speaker and a wonderful ambassador for Christ. Don was part of helping NETwork Ministries get on their feet 25 years ago.

Don started the evening with a story about one of the most accomplished and fabled tribes of Africa. No tribe was considered to have warriors more fearsome or more intelligent than the mighty Masai. It was surprising, then, to learn the traditional greeting that passes between Masai warriors: *"Kasserian Ingera,"* one would always say to another. It means, *"And how are the children?"*

It is still the traditional greeting among the Masai, acknowledging the high value that the Masai always place on their children's well-being. Even warriors with no children of their own would always give the traditional answer, *"All the children are well."* Meaning that peace and safety prevail, that the priorities of protecting the young and the powerless, are in place. *“All the children are well"* means that life is good. It means that the daily struggles for existence do not impede proper caring for their young.

Don’s message really spoke to my heart not just for at-risk children and youth in Chambersburg, but for at-risk children and youth everywhere – including all the countries of the world - including all the valleys in which we live. And how are the children? Let us pray:

*Oh God, please help us to hear your call to us as stewards of the lives of the most vulnerable in the world. Help us to know what to do, help us to step out in faith, help us to release fear, help us to feed generosity, and help us starve out materialism and greed. Help us to hear your voice and your instructions of compassion & mercy & love. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

 Last week we thought together about what it means for us to be trustworthy stewards, meaning caretakers of the earth, of one another’s safety, and of the hearts, souls, and minds of the people in our lives. Stewardship is about maximizing God’s blessings for His glory – making the most of what God has given to us to build the Kingdom of God here on earth until the Day of His return!

Today we are thinking together about being stewards of the hearts, minds, souls, and bodies of children wherever they may be – close by or far away. It’s interesting that one of the things I remember about a sermon that Don Baker preached here probably a dozen years ago was a challenge he laid before us. We were still worshipping in one service at that time with maybe 75-100 people. I remember he said to the gathered congregation that a congregation our size should be sponsoring at least 50 Compassion children! I remember thinking, “Whoa! That’s a lot of children. That’s a lot of households making a financial and relational commitment to a complete little stranger in a foreign land. That’s pretty ‘out there,’ Don.” Now, we haven’t reached that numerical challenge, 50 children at one time **yet** – but I’m so grateful for all those children and their families whose lives we have been able to influence, including the 35 we are honoring (along with their sponsors) today. Thirty-five is pretty good! But is it all we can do?

 I want to read a familiar text, but one that deserves repeated attention, especially on a day like today. Please listen to these verses from Matthew 25:31-40. I’m reading from The Message, *“When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.’ “Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’”* **Play Compassion Video.** [**https://compassionsunday.com/plan-your-event/presentation/**](https://compassionsunday.com/plan-your-event/presentation/) **(Scroll down to “Main Video”)**

 You know me. You know I’m not one who would ever ask you to do something that John and I don’t already do. We have been sponsoring Derrick in Kenya for 13 years. He was 5 when we started supporting him and writing to him. He’s 18 now and writes things like this to us, *“I must say that indeed you have really changed my life from the support gifts and letters I do get from you has acted as a turning point to my life. Thank you for your steadfast love, care, and support you do provide me with through compassion.*” Over the years he would always tell us what he bought with a special birthday gift or Christmas gift we would send – things like a bag of grain, a goat, a pair of trousers, etc. I’m telling you folks, the relationships we have with our two compassion children across the globe in Kenya, Derrick and Virginia, help to keep us grounded. We are so incredibly spoiled in this country. Our phone stops working, and we act like it’s a national emergency when there are children everywhere who don’t have food to eat and clean water to drink.

 I’m not going to make a hard sell this morning. It’s not my style. In a little while you are going to see the faces of the children some households in our congregation are sponsoring for 38 dollars a month, making sure that children are being cared for physically, socially, economically, and spiritually. Compassion International has been around for 65 years with a clear and firm commitment to Christ, to children, and to the Church. Their mission is to **release children from poverty in Jesus’ name.** As a church we currently sponsor 35 children in 17 countries – 19 girls and 16 boys. Maybe you could take a prayer walk around the sanctuary after worship this morning, asking God if he is calling you to become a spiritual mentor, a friend, a surrogate parent, and a financial helper for a little one and his/her family. If you do sense a call to this ministry, please pick up the child packet and come to write the name of the child on the clipboard here on the front pew. We have taken photos of all the packets so we will have the rest of the information if you can give us the name. May God’s will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. Let’s pray together: *Heavenly Father – the Creator of all things in heaven and on earth – the giver of life – the One who knows us all and who knows our needs even before we ask. Thank you for each person here today, for how you have provided for them in times of plenty and in times of want. Please help us to be faithful and trustworthy stewards of the lives of children everywhere. Speak now to hearts opened by your Spirit – speak to us about your call to begin to financially and relationally invest in the life of a precious child enslaved by poverty. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

But on a Sunday called Compassion Sunday, I can’t just speak about the children made available to us for sponsorship through Compassion International. I can’t stop there. Because we are not just called to care for children through an organization like Compassion International, we are also called to care for, to steward the hearts, souls, minds, and bodies of the children who live in our own communities.

I think if we asked the schoolteachers among us, and perhaps those who are childcare providers, those who are nurses, or first-responders, or counselors, *‘And how are the children?’* I don’t think the answer would be a whole-hearted, *“All the children are well.”* I have heard how children are not well, who are coming into kindergarten with a need to be on medicine for anxiety issues. I’ve heard how many are living in single-parent households, or households with revolving boyfriends or girlfriends for the mom or dad, or households with parents who might be living there, but who are essentially absent, playing their video games, scrolling through their phones, working on their computers, or so embroiled in their own drama that they can’t be bothered to attend to the children entrusted to their care. I’ve heard about the abused children, the neglected children, the hungry children, the lonely children, the bullied children, the discarded children, the children who can’t stay awake in school because they’ve been up since dawn taking care of a younger sibling while the parent couldn’t get themselves out of bed. We don’t like to think about this. We don’t like to think that this happens next door. We prefer thinking that these problems are not for the average white American household. But that’s just not true.

NETwork Ministry’s mission statement is as follows: *Our mission is to share in the love of Christ with those who are most vulnerable in our community. We especially seek to equip children and young adults with the skills necessary for spiritual growth, academic achievement, life management, and Christian leadership.*

Spiritual growth, academic achievement, life management, and Christian leadership. Just think if all the children in our communities were receiving this kind of equipping on a regular basis. Just think if, instead of going home to an empty house or an abusive situation or a house where substance addiction rules the roost, just think what could happen to the hearts, minds, souls, and bodies of the children of our communities. Just think.

 What are we to do? How are we to really make a difference in the lives of the children? What is God calling us to do? I think there is something big out there for us to do. Something big. Something God-sized. Something so extraordinary that all we can do is fall on our knees in prayer about it. Because I don’t know about you, but I don’t like feeling a sense of grief, and sadness, and even failure when I hear the question about the kids around us, *“And how are the children?”* I want, desperately, to be able to answer, *“All the children are not well, but we’re working on it. We’re following the Lord. We’re doing our part.”*

 Let us pray: *Heavenly Father – open our eyes to the needs around us. Open our hearts to the hurting among us. Open our minds to the possibilities. You are a great and awesome God. Nothing is impossible with You. We seek Your way and Your will for the children of our communities, the children of our nation, and the children of the world. Speak Lord, for Your children are listening. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*