

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, August 1, 2021**

**CIA: COMPASSION IN ACTION
Mark 5:21-43**

We Americans love acronyms, don't we? It seems like there is an acronym for just about everything under the sun. We've got AAA, ASAP, ATM, ACLU, ATF, AWOL, and AOC – and that is just some of the A's. We have ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, ESPN, and, for fans of the Nats and Orioles, MASN. Speaking of sports, we've got MLB, NCAA, the NFL, NBA, NHL, FIFA, PGA, and WWE (if you count that kind of wrestling as a sport!).

We have POTUS, FLOTUS, and SCOTUS. In our government we've got the DOD, DOJ, DEA, DHS, the FBI, the IRS ... and how could I not mention the CDC? It would be even more egregious if I left out NCIS!

The list could go on and on: FYI, BTW, ICYMI, NIMBY, YOLO, FOMO, DIY, TBA, TBD, TGIF, SPF, CEO, CFO, GMO, NGO, RSVP, and OCD (which, right about now, you may think I have!). Just a couple more:

- EPC: The family of churches our church family belongs to, whose mission is to carry out the Great Commission of Jesus as a denomination of Presbyterian, Reformed, Evangelical, and Missional congregations; and
- CIA: Not *that* CIA. You hear "CIA," and you think of the Central Intelligence Agency, our nation's spy organization, headquartered in Langley, Virginia. But I want to suggest a different meaning for CIA today. I want you to see this acronym as it relates to Jesus, who embodied a CIA of a different kind: *Compassion in Action*.

A few months ago, on the Sunday after Easter, we looked at Jesus' encounter in Mark 1:40 with a man with leprosy who came up to Jesus and begged Him to heal him. This is how Mark describes what happened: "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man" (1:41) – which was an absolute no-no; nobody was supposed to touch a leper; it was an unthinkable thing to do. What happened? "Then and there the leprosy was gone" (1:42, *MSG*). He was cured.

Matthew 9:36 speaks of the compassion Jesus had on the crowds who came to Him, because they were so vulnerable and helpless, so susceptible to being led astray spiritually, like sheep without a shepherd. He was motivated by compassion when He provided dinner for 5000 men, plus women and children, on one occasion, and then for 4000 plus on another (Matthew 14:14, Mark 6:34; Matthew 15:32, Mark 8:2).

On another occasion, Jesus, moved with compassion, touched the eyes of two blind men and restored their sight (Matthew 20:34). On yet another occasion, in the town of Nain,

His heart went out to a widow whose only son had died, and He restored her son to life (Luke 7:11-15).

Compassion, or the lack of it, also takes center stage in three of Jesus' parables: The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37); the Prodigal Son, whose father was filled with compassion for his wayward son (Luke 15:11-32); and the Unforgiving Debtor, whose boss or "master" took pity on him when he couldn't pay his debt, but then he, the debtor, refused to show compassion to a co-worker who owed him a much smaller amount of money (Matthew 18:21-35). Such a pickle he got himself into, because he would not treat his co-worker the way he wanted his boss to treat *him*.

The word "compassion" is used 77 times in the NIV translation of the Bible, 63 of them in the Old Testament. The word "compassionate" occurs 14 times, 12 of them in the Old Testament. Every time "compassionate" is used in the Old Testament, it refers to God. Let me give you some examples:

- In Exodus 34:6-7, the Lord revealed Himself to Moses with the words: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."
- Much later, in 2 Chronicles 30:9, Hezekiah, one of the good kings of the nation of Judah, called on the people to celebrate the Passover, which they had long-neglected, reminding them that "The LORD your God is gracious and compassionate."
- Later yet, after the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the exile in Babylon, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to begin rebuilding the city. As he led his fellow Israelites in a prayer of confession and repentance, he prayed: "But You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love" (Nehemiah 9:27). In his prayer, Nehemiah chronicled how the Israelite people had repeatedly turned away from God and went their own way. "But when they were oppressed (by other nations) they cried out to You. From heaven You heard them, and in Your great compassion You gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies." It happened again and again. "And when they cried out to You again, You heard from heaven, and in Your compassion You delivered them time after time" (Nehemiah 9:27, 28).
- The prophet Joel urged the wayward people to "return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity" (Joel 2:13).
- The Lord did exactly that in the city of Nineveh, to the consternation of Jonah, who wanted God to destroy the city and its people. Jonah thought judgment was what Nineveh deserved. When God had mercy on Nineveh, Jonah was angry and said to the Lord: "I knew You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to

anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (Jonah 4:2). Jonah wanted grace and compassion for himself, but not for Nineveh. “Grace and compassion for me, but not for thee.”

- The Psalms pick up this refrain and repeat it in several places: In Psalm 86:15, David says: “You, O LORD, are a compassionate and gracious God....” He says it again in Psalm 103:8, and again in Psalm 145:8. Psalm 111:4 (author not known) says it, too. Psalm 116:5 (author unknown) says: “The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.” In Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, verse 156 says: “Your compassion is great, O LORD.”

As with acronyms, I could go on and on.

- In Psalm 103:4, David says God is worthy of our praise, in part, because He “crowns (us) with love and compassion.” In verse 13, he reminds us that, “As a [loving] father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on (us).” In Psalm 145:9-10, he says: “The LORD is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made. All You have made will praise You, O LORD; Your saints (i.e., your people) will extol You.”
- Just one more example from the Old Testament, and then one from the New: In Lamentations 3, which was the biblical inspiration for the hymn “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” Jeremiah declares: “Because of the LORD’s steadfast love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (3:22-23). Then, just a little later: “Though He brings grief, He will show compassion, so great is His unfailing love” (3:32).
- In the New Testament, in his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul says: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4a).

Do you get the picture? God is a compassionate God. Compassion is an eternal attribute of God. It tells us what God is like. Jesus is a compassionate Savior. Jesus, we might say, is “Compassion Incarnate,” in flesh and blood. It is crystal clear that His compassion is more than a feeling. It is way, way more than a feeling. Jesus did not just feel pity toward people in their problems and needs and spiritual poverty. He embodied CIA: Compassion in Action.

You can see it in all the examples I’ve already cited from the Gospels. We saw it last week in the way Jesus healed the madman in the cemetery whose life had been taken over by a “legion” of demons (Mark 5:1-20). Now we see it in the way Jesus responds to a plea from a desperate father named Jairus whose only daughter (Luke 8:42), just 12 years old and no doubt the apple of his eye, was near death, and to the incognito efforts of a woman who desperately wanted to be healed of a disease she had lived with for 12 years – as long as the daughter of Jairus had been alive.

It was desperation that drove both this unnamed woman and Jairus, a respected leader in the community, one of the elders of the local synagogue, to Jesus. As Kent Hughes points out, desperation is sometimes the prelude to grace (R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, 125). Chuck Swindoll says that desperation can actually be a gift from God (Swindoll, *Living Insights on Mark*, 139). Sometimes a person has to be desperate, with no other options, before he or she will turn to Jesus. Sometimes even then, there are people who refuse to come to Him. *Do not be like them!* People who turn their backs to God are headed in the wrong direction, and if they keep going the way they are headed, as someone has said, they will end up where they are going.

But here is a man who would do anything he could to save his daughter, and a woman who has done everything she could think of. She had tried every home remedy imaginable to stop her bleeding. She had spent all the money she had on doctors. But her condition only got worse. Jesus was her last hope. Her *only* hope.

Jairus got to Him first, when Jesus and the disciples arrived back on the Galilee side of the lake and got out of the boat. Jesus went with Jairus without hesitation. But they got delayed on the way to Jairus' house. A crowd of people tagged along, pushing and jostling Jesus along the way. In the crowd was this desperate woman, who thought to herself: "If I can just touch His robe with my finger, I will be healed" (5:28). Then she could finally get on with her life. When she touched Jesus, it happened. She was healed. Totally. Completely. Instantly. But Jesus would not let her stay under the radar. She wanted to remain anonymous. But Jesus wanted a relationship. He wanted her to know Him. And He wanted to know her.

While Jesus was talking with her, Jairus got word that it was too late to help his daughter. She was dead. No reason to bother Jesus now. If only that woman had not distracted Him. If only Jesus had not stopped to talk to her. He might have been able to save the girl.

Jesus, though, was not dissuaded. He told Jairus not to be afraid, not to give up, but to trust Him – to believe and keep on believing. There are more details, but the short version of the story is that, when they got to the house, Jesus went into the girl's room with her parents and three of His disciples (Peter, James, and John), and He restored the young girl to life.

The parents of the girl, and the disciples who were with Jesus, were amazed at what they witnessed. In Mark's words, they were "astonished with great astonishment." They were ecstatic "with great ecstasy" (Greek, *ekstasei*). As it says in *The Message*, "They were all beside themselves with joy" (Mark 5:42).

Wouldn't you be? I would.

Do you see not only the power of Jesus on display but His CIA? His Compassion in Action? Never forget that our God is full of compassion (Psalm 116:5) and His compassions never fail (Lamentations 3:22), even if or when He allows you (or me) to have "a thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7), as Paul did, that daily reminds us of our

dependence on Him. Or if He chooses not to heal someone we love deeply. He is still “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.” His grace is still sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9), and always will be. At all times. In all things.

One last thing before I’m done: The CIA of Jesus calls for a response from us. It calls for the response of FIA: *Faith in Action*. Neither Jairus nor the woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years had an accurate or mature faith in Jesus. Their faith was imperfect, but it was real. They had enough faith to believe Jesus could help them. And He did. He saw the seeds of faith in their hearts as they put their faith in action.

FIA: Faith in Action is what Jesus desires to see in us. In you. In me.

Rejoice in the compassionate heart of God. Rejoice in the CIA of Jesus. Join Jesus in His CIA. And join Jairus and this woman in the FIA (Faith in Action). Because, as the Bible says, faith without deeds – without action – is dead (James 2:26).

Lord, let it be so in us, to the glory of Your name. Amen.