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When Jesus Passes By - September 5, 2021

Matthew 20:30-34

We live at a time where people are disagreeing in disagreeable ways, making personal attacks, instead of focusing on the issues. It seems like we are just so deeply divided, and that we seem to be living in two different worlds although we are neighbours and friends, and even relatives.

Good people know that the most important thing is not that we agree on things, it's that we practice kindness, respect and fairness, whatever our points of view. Because if we win an argument or are right about something....if we are not respectful in the process, it's not going to end up helping us or anybody else.

Whereas, if we can stay kind and respectful of our differences, especially when we disagree, then good things are going to come of it. Disagree without becoming disagreeable...we are all allies...good things happen when we put love first.

When we put fairness and kindness first, Jesus passes by. Mark's begins his story of Jesus' call to the disciples to follow him with the words, "As Jesus passed by".

These words sound casual, rather nondescript, but to the people he was writing to, reading these words in Greek, they were loaded with significance.

They were, in fact, the very same words used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, an allusion to references where God was experienced as passing by in such a compelling way, that those who felt the passing were changed in some significant way...

In Exodus 33:19 we read the words...I will pass before you and will proclaim my name YHWH, the one who is gracious and merciful...God's proclamation of the mission given to Moses on Mount Sinai. God passed by, and Moses ministry was reconfirmed, deepened and strengthened.

And in I Kings 19: 11, Elijah, who in his depression was taken by angel of God to that same mountain is told to Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by...And God did, bringing new life and hope to Elijah.

Passing by can have that positive connotation of a positive experience because someone passed by.

When I started my singing career at 18, I used to sing with a local band in Antigua at resorts all over the island. The St. James' Club was one of the premier resorts who hosted all kinds of major stars, and one night I was on stage, I don't remember exactly which song I was singing, but who would walk by and wave but Whitney Houston. She passed by our stage while I was singing.... I think my breath stopped!

There are people that I like to be around...people who are warm and engaging and caring, some have a good sense of humour and get me laughing, some have good

ideas and stimulate good ideas in my mind, some show their love by cooking a great meal or show up when I need a hand, some inspire me with their simple goodness, especially when I see them bear a heavy burden with grace.

I'm always blessed when people like that pass by and say hello. That's what Jesus was like. People who were in need of one thing or another loved it when he passed by, like the people in our scripture today.

'As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. "Lord," they answered, "we want our sight." Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.'

He gave them vision to physically see the world around them, changing their lives forever.... Jesus' own vision of kindness and compassion to the people around him made him unable to pass by these faithful men without helping them.

And His vision of God evolving a better world where everyone gets what they need excited a lot of people.

Jesus passed by and Simon and Andrew left their jobs and homes and joined his movement of love. Immediately.

So it was with James and John and Salome and Mary Magdalene....Jesus passed by and good things happen.

We are Jesus too when we channel the spirit of Jesus' love and compassion. We can be the people who bless others... we can be that person, who people give thanks for, when we pass by.

Because when we are kind, and respectful and fair we become more than just an ordinary person. Love makes us extraordinary and allows us to bless people when we pass by.

But there is another way we use the phrase...pass by. You remember the story....a fellow on a journey was pounced on by thieves who stole everything he had, even stripped him naked, beat him up and left him for dead.

A priest came along and had things to do, so left the guy and passed by. And then a politician came by and deciding that he might lose support if he helped a man who was an immigrant and someone of a different religion, he passed by. Quite a different pass by...

The passing by of indifference... the passing by of I'm too busy... the passing by of that person doesn't look like me, I can't trust them... the passing by of what would the neighbours think, the passing by of anger...the passing by of just not even noticing someone.....

We either share in spreading the love of Jesus passing by or we deepen the wounds of life by finding reasons for passing by with indifference.

Jesus is continually passing by us, in all our situations, and Jesus graces us with love and compassion, and not indifference.

An elderly couple in my friend sue's church in the country were driving a few weeks ago in London and didn't see a car just coming over the crest of a hill at a high rate of speed. The crash was so intense that their car caught on fire and they were unconscious.

The car behind stopped and the driver passed by their window to see what was what. He ran to get a baseball bat and fire extinguisher from his car and smashed open the window and got them out before the car exploded in flames.

They later died of their injuries, but the family got to speak with their mother for a few precious days and the family were so grateful that their parents didn't end their lives burning up in the car. They were so thankful for that stranger who, like Jesus, passed by and brought them comfort.

This is why we get together in worship...to be reminded that we get to be like Jesus too..and the more we are like Jesus, the more Jesus will pass by.

Thanks be to God, Amen...

Prayer: Dear God, who passes by in all our moments, we come to you today in thanksgiving. We give you thanks

because when you pass by, you leave us feeling better, comforted, energized, renewed. And you remind us of the opportunities we are presented to be active passersby, to bless each other, to practice fair and compassionate interaction with each other.

Jesus told us the story of the Good Samaritan, as an example of who we are called to be to each other. We pray that everything that hinders us from being that person of goodwill will fall away from us, everything that makes us indifferent to each other, and each other's issues will fade away....

We pray for each other in sincerity and love today. We pray for our sick and shut-ins... we pray for the people who occupy our minds and our hearts who are waiting for you to pass by....

We pray for the countries of Benin, The Ivory Coast and Togo. We pray for our own country of Canada as we approach the election.

We pray that we will always feel your presence when you pass by... we pray all this in Jesus name... who taught us to pray.....