

CREATING A COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY

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So, compassion -- creating compassionate community within us and around us. So, what's the definition of compassion? Compassion is defined as a feeling of kindness and care for another person. A feeling of kindness and care for another person. And compassion feels good, doesn't it? It feels good when someone shows you -- extends -- compassion and kindness to you. And it feels good when you give compassion and kindness to another person.

And so, about a month ago, three to four weeks ago, I was going throughout my day, and these words -- compassionate, community -- kept bubbling up, kept coming to me. And so, when that happens -- when I keep hearing a phrase like that over and over again: compassionate/community, compassionate/community -- I thought, *"Okay, Spirit needs me to talk about this."*

And then that night, my husband and I went to the theater, and we went and saw the musical, "Come From Away." Cassie was also in it, by the way. So, she's tied throughout the story for today. So, the musical, "Come From Away": amazing! It's a musical based on the small Canadian town of Gander, the province of Newfoundland and Canada. It's a story following the actual real events of what happened after September 11th.

And the fact that -- and I forgot that -- U.S. airspace was closed for at least five days. And that meant there was 38 planes -- close to 7,000 passengers -- that were ordered to land unexpectedly at Gander International Airport. Has anyone heard of that before? No. The town is only about 10,000 people. So suddenly 7,000 people were doubling the population. And so now these townspeople had to figure out: How do we prepare for, how do we care for 7,000 additional people suddenly coming to our community?

And the characters in the musical are based on actual real Gander residents, as well as the stranded travelers that were housed and fed during those five days. And what's beautiful and amazing is that these residents made sure there were homes for everybody to sleep in, that they got showers. They made sure that babies had their food and their diapers. They donated their clothing so that people could change their clothes, because you couldn't take your luggage off the planes. Everything had to stay in the holding areas. So, they didn't have clothing. So here, all the townspeople come together; donate clothing.

There was a husband and wife that, again, couldn't take anything out of the holding area of the plane, but there were animals and pets there. So, one couple in particular went and they were feeding the animals; checking on them; giving them their medication. There were chimpanzees on one of the planes they had to take care of.

Yeah; this town of 10,000 put together a whole cook-out. Grilled; brought their grills in; brought food in; brought drink in. And really hosted these 7,000 stranded passengers. They just donated everything.

So, as I was watching this true story ... and again, it was in the same 24 hours that I had been hearing these words, compassionate community. And all I could think of as I was watching this play, this musical, was: this is the quintessential example of compassionate community. This is rising to the occasion and extending kindness like none other.

Now, another example, of course, have been the Olympics. Of course, there's always going to be some outliers, right? But overall, the Olympics, which I love -- I've been a fan of the Olympics since I was a little girl. And what I love about the Olympics is it's all the countries coming together to play. All the countries are coming together just to do sport with one another.

And I went to the Olympic website, because I kind of went down a rabbit hole, and I found that there's three foundational values of the Olympics. They are excellence, respect, and friendship. Respect and friendship. And then it says that some of the original Olympic values included: preserve human dignity and develop harmony.

And what if that was all of our values with one another? Respect, friendship, human dignity, developing harmony with one another. That is compassionate community. That is coming together.

And then, of course, you have the athletes that after they win, you know, they say, *"It took a village."* They've got family, friends, their training center. The whole town has raised money for them. There's so many people that are standing behind who have offered their kindness and support to that Olympian in that Olympic moment.

And usually -- maybe not always, but usually -- we have an easier time extending compassion to those who are close to us. But it's especially challenging to extend compassion to those who are not in our circle of friends and family; who are not in our sphere of influence; who maybe are different than us.

So, I was listening to Buddhist psychologist/meditation teacher Tara Brock. Maybe some of you know her. She's got a podcast. And in one of her podcasts, she was talking about the story of Jonah in the Bible, and how Jonah in the Bible really represents how we can extend the best of ourselves -- choose to extend the best of ourselves -- or not.

So, God had told Jonah to go to Nineveh and to warn them to turn away from their wickedness. Go to this town, warn them to turn away from their wickedness. But Jonah didn't like them, so he didn't do it. Instead, he runs away; he gets on a ship; he sails off to sea. And sure enough, a big storm comes up, and it looks like the ship's going to break apart. And the sailors are starting to throw things overboard, because they need to make the ship lighter.

But also these sailors are starting to wonder, *"Okay, who made God mad? Who caused all this?"* And they pull out of the hat the name Jonah. And they're like, *"It was you."*

And Jonah says, *"It was me. because I ran away from the Lord. I didn't do what God told me to do. He said to be kind and helpful, and I said, 'I don't like those people,' so I ran away. So, if you throw me overboard, then it's God who's mad at me, so the storm will stop."*

So, they threw him overboard, and the water became calm. And, of course, as we know, Jonah gets swallowed up by a big fish, and he's there for three days and three nights. And in those three days and three nights, he's praying. And he's giving thanks for being alive. And then suddenly, he's spit out onto land. And at that time, when God says, *"Go warn the people of Nineveh,"* then he goes and he does it.

So metaphysically -- that's how Unity looks at the Bible: metaphysically, beyond the literal; the spiritual view of this. So, when we get into a storm, right? We get into a turmoil over something. We get angry. We get upset. And we might get resistant to listening to Spirit. We get that tug of, *"Well, I know I probably should do that. That would be the best thing to do. But I don't really want to do that."* Sometimes we don't want to listen to that divine voice within us/around us. We'd rather listen to our ego. We'd rather listen to Groupthink. So, that's what Jonah was doing.

But also, we see this number three. So, three -- of course, the Trinity. In Unity, we look at it as manifestation, really. It's Divine Mind -- idea - expression. It's how everything comes into creation.

So here, Jonah is sitting in this fish. Now, fish ... In those biblical days, when you said I got swallowed up by a fish, it would be like me today saying, like, *"Wow, I really got myself into a pickle."* Did I really get myself into a pickle? No. I got myself into a conundrum, right? I got myself into a tough spot.

So, here he is sitting in a tough spot for three days and three nights creating; manifesting. And what is he creating/manifesting? Thanksgiving. Gratitude. He's giving thanks for still being alive. It's during this time of prayer that he realigns himself with his divine purpose. And it's that gratitude that opens -- literally opens -- that way out. And it's the acceptance versus the resistance that dissolves, right? The acceptance dissolves that resistance of *"Like, maybe I should have listened to God and be nice."* But it's his spiritual reset.

So how does this relate to compassion? So, when do we resist compassion? When do we resist offering compassion? Usually it's when we don't like the other. We don't agree with the other. Or maybe: *"I'm just too busy. I don't have time for that."*

Ultimately, we resist offering compassion when we're running away from our divine nature. When we stop listening to Divine Love -- that which is God, which is always telling us to make peace. Jonah's name, in fact, means dove. Be the dove; be the peace.

We stop offering compassion when we forget our inherent goodness. We stop offering compassion when we forget that we live in an abundant universe. You have plenty of time, and there are plenty of resources to go around. It is an abundant universe.

We stop offering compassion when we're stressed out; when we're trying to control things. So, we shut down; we turn away, versus opening our hearts and our hands to another person. We get so wrapped up sometimes in our own pain, our own fear, that we react from our humanness instead of our spiritual beingness.

You know, sometimes I'll be scrolling on Facebook, and there'll be news articles that come up. And it's something terrible that's happened to a person or a group of people, or it will hurt them in some way. And then somebody -- I don't know who -- somebody has put a laughing emoji. Now, my husband, Juan, says, *"Stacy, it's social media; just keeps scrolling."* But it hurts my heart. It hurts my heart to think that someone's laughing at someone else's misfortune.

But also it hurts my heart because the internal pain that this person is experiencing to laugh at someone else's loss or tragedy. That their sense of separation is so strong that they have gotten to remember; to know that we are all connected in a human community. That we're all connected to this life and light of God, divine life. We're all connected. So, we need to see each other not as the other, but as expressions of God itself; of the Divine.

Here's what Brené Brown, author/speaker, wrote. *"Spirituality is recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a Power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion."*

See, the town of Gander -- with those 7,000 strangers suddenly coming into their town -- they could have turned away in fear. They could have said, *"This is not our problem; airlines' problem."* But instead, they treated those strangers as a human family. They treated them as if they were family. They treated them like, *"If this had happened to me or someone in my family that got stranded miles and miles in a different country away for days, here's how I would want to be treated."* They extended their inherent goodness.

We need to remember our inherent goodness. And that includes ourselves, because we can criticize and be really cruel to ourselves. But what if, instead, we offered compassion, grace, kindness. Instead of criticizing another person for not doing things the way we would want to do it, or seeing things a different way, what if we offered compassion, grace, and kindness? Instead of criticizing them, what if we offered compassion, grace, and kindness?

Because ... And ... compassion shows up really clearly in our words. Our words carry weight. They are powerful. They create our lives. In the beginning was the Word. So, our words are another way we show compassion, how we express peace to one another and to ourselves.

So, what words am I saying to myself? Am I at war with myself or am I at peace with myself? How about if I extended an olive branch to my own being?

The words that you use with others -- whether it's in conversation, social media, text, email -- are you throwing bombs or bouquets? "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." You can't say you want peace in the world, and then you're attacking yourself or you're attacking others with your own words, thoughts and actions.

We must remember our inherent goodness. Be the dove. Extend peace and kindness to others, including yourself. Compassion to others in our homes, in our families. Compassion here in our church with one another. Compassion in our workplaces. To offer "*Namaste*" wherever you go. Even if you don't say it out loud, but to offer that "*Namaste*": that the light in me recognizes and honors the light in you.

What if we ignite that light within, our theme for the year, and recognize that the light in others is there so that compassion is the reaction. So that our first reaction is compassion.

We can ask ourselves: How can I remember that I'm connected to this person by a Power greater than both of us? If they've struggled, if they've done something wrong ... and when have I done that? Extending compassion as we would like compassion extended to ourselves.

We were just in Old Town, Scottsdale, with some friends from out of town. And when one of the shops there was a T-shirt, and the T-shirt said, "*If a man speaks in a desert where no woman could hear, is he still wrong?*" [Congregants laugh]

But a true story: there was a toddler. I saw a post where a toddler was watching -- going back to the Olympics again. A toddler was watching figure skating in the Olympics, and one of the skaters fell. And the toddler yelled out to the TV -- the skater in the TV -- yelled out, "*It's okay! Maybe the ice was slippery!*" [Congregants laugh]

It's okay; maybe the ice was slippery. In Arizona we'd say, "*It's okay; maybe the road was melting.*" [Congregants laugh] "*Maybe the sand was slippery.*"

But compassion. Compassion expressed as grace, as understanding, as support. As the Hindi tradition teaches, those who find the way are those who have love and forgiveness in their hearts. Those who find the way are those who have love and forgiveness in their hearts.

And then, of course, there's Judas' question to Jesus: "*How do we find the way?*" And Jesus answers, "*By developing love and compassion.*"

So, to build and create compassion, we open our hearts. We extend grace and offer forgiveness -- again, both to ourselves and other people. We recognize that we're all connected to a loving Power and Presence. We ask: How can I be Divine Love? How can I be God in this moment? How can I express the loving awareness that I am? How can I express the loving awareness that I am?

How can you -- a limitless expression of the Divine -- express more compassion and kindness to the other people in your life? How can you extend more compassion and kindness to yourself? And how -- as a limitless expression of the Divine -- extend more compassion and kindness to those around you?

Because remember: you, like Jonah, are here to listen and take action on the voice of Divine Love, bringing unity, bringing harmony, bringing your light and loving nature to each interaction that you have.

That, my friends, is how we build compassionate community within us and around us. And so, thank you. I thank you for welcoming me into your community two years ago.

Blessings, everyone!

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