

### 1. Rose Espinoza and her husband moved into their first home in Brea, California in 1991.

But they soon started wondering if they'd made a huge mistake. Boys with baseball bats hung out on the corners, looking for a fight. Then a bit later, after a drive-by shooting on their street, they really started worrying, particularly as they had an 8 year old son. They initiated a neighbourhood watch group, but the morning after the first meeting a clear message was spray-painted on their truck, "Don't finger us, keep your mouth shut."

Rose knew she had to take a different approach to the problem. In September that year, she transformed her two-car garage into a free after-school tutoring programme, Rosie's Garage, complete with computers, books, and banners. They started by offering homework help and free lemonade, and 16 kids showed up on the first day. It was the first tutoring programme in the neighbourhood, and it was clear that the kids really did want to learn. Rosie's Garage literally transformed the Espinoza's neighbourhood; within two years, academic scores went up and the crime rate went down. And it's such a great idea that it's spread across the locality.

What drove Rose and her husband to do this? I don't know more about their story, but it seems to me that faced with their situation as it was, they chose a way of compassion.

### 2. As I reflected on today's gospel reading, it felt to me somewhat lacking in drama.

The two extracts we have heard today actually sandwich two dramatic miracles – the feeding of the five thousand, and Jesus walking on the water – but in the gospel extracts chosen for us today, we don't have any 'high point' moments. But what I noticed, combined with our other readings, is that there is a thread of compassion running through the narrative.

What drives you to be the person you are, and want to be? What drives the people in this world whom we admire and deeply respect? We might name a few things. But our readings today make it clear to me: (more than any other quality?) Jesus is driven by compassion.

**3. The apostles have arrived back after their 'mission' and are talking with Jesus of all they taught and did.** Jesus says it is time for a rest so they head off for a retreat in their boats – but they are spotted. So when they arrive at the destination and disembark, the crowds have caught up. We read: ***'As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things'.*** (v.34)

There goes the retreat! Maybe they had some quiet moments on the boat, we hope! But now, Jesus' compassion forces him to change tack, and spend some more time with these people.

The Greek word used for compassion is *σπλαγχνίζω*, a hard word to say (*splanchnizo!*). It is related to the word for guts or entrails. We have our word spleen from the same root. It is a visceral, 'gut wrenching' feeling that is described. It is the same word used:

- Elsewhere to describe Jesus' compassion which drives him to heal and feed the crowds.
- To describe the feeling the Good Samaritan has when he sees the man left for dead on the side of the road (Luke 10.33).
- To describe the feeling the father has when he sees the 'prodigal' son in the distance returning home (Luke 15.20).

It is not that Jesus does not respect the need for rest. We know elsewhere he does retreat, find quiet places to be alone, for him and his disciples. It is just that his yardstick for discerning the need is compassion! This time, his compassion drives him to discern that the need now is for these people, greater than his and his disciples need to be alone.

### 4. Often great leaders are admired for their sense of strategy and vision. They have a plan!

In Jesus' ministry as we read of it in the gospels, a strategy is sometimes difficult to detect. There is a goal of wanting people to understand the love of God, and in this way we could say Jesus sets his

face towards Jerusalem. So yes, he has a very big, over-arching goal. But his means, his strategy by which he gets there is not so clear. In our reading today, he crosses the lake. And then he crosses back again. The details of his travel agenda are driven by compassion!

And we could ask where does he choose to spend his time? Surely, to get his message across most 'efficiently' to the greatest amount of people, the best plan would be to focus on the places of most significant population (Jerusalem, Jericho etc). That's what Paul did: he realised he was called to the 'Gentiles' and picked off strategic cities around the Roman Empire in the mediterranean, ending up in Rome! But Jesus, we read, **'wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places.....'** (Mark 6.56)

It seems his travel itinerary is affected by his drive for compassion! He doesn't just go to cities, but also goes to villages or farms. His vision is lived out in the moment driven by compassion.

##### **5. Last week we talked of Jesus vocation being in the line of the great prophets of old.**

Today we heard from one of them, Jeremiah. He expressed anger on behalf of God against the leaders of the people of his day who, he said, had not led the people faithfully. He used the image of a shepherd and said they were evil shepherds who led their sheep into danger. He promised God would raise a good shepherd. Jesus, we read elsewhere, is the Good Shepherd. In our famous Psalm today, we hear King David's words – when he had experienced so much danger in his life – celebrating the fact that the 'Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want'.

Both these images – of Jeremiah, of David – talk of a God of compassion. Jesus represents that God of compassion in human terms.

##### **6. And we could even widen this out more socio-politically when we reflect on Paul's message to the Ephesians which we heard today.**

Paul was Jew by background. He was convinced by the message of Jesus and His compassion that in fact, Gentiles (non-jews) had as much access to God as the Jews. He proclaimed this message around the cities of the Roman empire. Trouble was, the local people didn't believe it! The local Jews could not believe that the Gentiles could have access to God, without becoming Jewish. The local Gentiles couldn't believe that they might have access to this God of mercy and compassion; or if they did, they did not see why they had to become Jewish.

So friction arose between the groups of followers of Christ: those Jewish followers who said you had to adopt the Jewish ways and the Gentile who said you didn't. These conflicts take deep roots. It is the subject of many of Paul's letters. We might think it sounds trivial but my sense is, it is no different to the deep divisions we see in our societies today. We see bitter dividing lines within the established churches. We see bitter division between Catholics and Protestants in different parts of the world. We see bitter division amongst various groups in many countries, including here in France, in UK, in USA, elsewhere. But Paul writes: **'For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.'** (Ephesians 2.14-18).

We each have access to the Father he says. Because that Father is a God of compassion. Jesus is a peacemaker based on his deep belief in the compassion God has for all.

**7. What drives you? We all have our projects, our goals, our desires.** But if we will live the Jesus way, we are called to emulate his way of compassion. May God give us the strength and the wisdom to enact this in our lives.