

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DEACON?



*Devotions
for Deacons*



DIACONAL MINISTRIES
CANADA

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Growing Together

Compassion



Scripture Reading: Matthew 20:29-34

It is almost Passover, and faithful Jews are on their way to Jerusalem. And so is Jesus, walking the road from Jericho, soon to fulfill the Passover feast in a way the Jews around Him cannot conceive of. The crowd grows larger as Jesus leaves the city. You can probably imagine the talking, laughing, and singing as they anticipate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Their king! They are on their way, blind to the significance of this journey. And yet, ironically, the crowd tells the blind men begging by the road that Jesus does not have time for them. How little they understand about Jesus, about who He is and what He has come to do.

Over the din of the crowd, the blind men shout for Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" He asks. They want His mercy; they want healing. And so, Jesus has compassion on them and heals them.

In this story, and certainly others, Jesus is moved to action by the sickness, suffering or hunger around Him. He is not simply meeting needs so He can get on with teaching and other priorities; His heart is filled with

compassion as He shows grace and mercy by healing, but also by affirming value, restoring dignity, and demonstrating worth. How amazing the mercy and compassion of a loving God. "His mercies never end. They are new every morning" (Lam. 3:23). Each day, the heart of God overflows for His people. For your church and for your community. For you.

Mercy and compassion often go hand in hand. In Scripture, they most often reference God's character and challenge us to develop ours. Mercy and compassion are also pretty fundamental to the role of the deacon. The form for the ordination of deacons starts with mercy. But what about compassion? Are mercy and compassion interchangeable? Well, if you look carefully, you can see that they are certainly related. Compassion seems to be primarily about the heart; it means to "suffer with." Jesus shows mercy when He is moved with compassion. Compassion, it seems, compels those acts of mercy that are central to the role of the deacon.

Giving to those in need is one act of mercy. Deacons, you know the responsibility of using gifts wisely and with discernment. You care about what you are doing and you put deliberate thought into it. But the challenge is to engage your heart. Even at arm's length, it is not impossible, but certainly more difficult to create a compassionate connection to those in need who receive what we offer and have much to give in return.

So, back to Jesus. When He is moved with compassion, He is often moved by what or whom He sees in front of Him. The person. The heart. The suffering. He knows a woman's brokenness, He knows her pain. But Jesus also looks past the immediate need to the dignity and worth of the person in front of Him. And He loves her. He loves him. He loves people like the rich young ruler, a prostitute, and the Samaritan woman.

To be moved with compassion means a certain vulnerability. It means allowing God to break your heart for the people around you. But, before all of that, it

means cultivating a heart like the heart of God.

But how can we even begin to have a heart like God? An important place to begin is to begin with prayer. Ask for His Holy Spirit. Open His Word and learn from Him. Devotion and prayer time is very important for your diaconate. Grow together. Be intentional. Set a goal of spiritual growth as deacons. Make it as important a time together as your time discussing the "business" of your agenda.

And God will bless that. And He will soften and break and mend and mold your hearts. Little by little.

And then get out there. Immerse yourself in your community and the people around you. Listen to them. Learn who they are and what they have to offer. Learn about the injustices they suffer, the needs that they have. Feel with compassion their brokenness and pain.

And then, from that place, let the love of Jesus, cultivated and growing within your diaconate, overflow your heart into acts of mercy and love.