

**3rd August, 2014.**

**Reading: Psalm 145: 8 - 19**

**Sermon: Reflect the Compassion of God**

Over the last year or two, there have been several serious incidents in this community, and numerous other more minor incidents which have led to people appearing in court and being charged with assault or with some other form of criminal activity.

The behaviour which has been witnessed or recorded is not what we expect in this community. Compared to the towns and cities, we would consider Argyll to be a safe place to bring up children, a safe place to wander around at night, a safe place in which to offer hospitality to strangers and to locals and yet it seems to be becoming less safe. This used to be a community in which you could leave your door open without fear of intruders or burglars. That is sadly no longer the case and it can't all be blamed on incomers.

There are those who cannot understand how the town has come to be in this state but in some ways it is almost inevitable and I hate to say that.

What is happening in the rest of the world is happening here in Lochgilphead albeit on a smaller scale. I have said in past weeks that just as war tears countries apart in other areas of the world, the same tensions tear families, friends and colleagues apart in our corner of the world. The same anger and jealousies, the same greed, the same power struggles, the same desire for revenge and the same preoccupation with self, where everyone is out to get what they can and to ensure that number one is ok, these things exist not just in the hearts of those who bring about wars but in the hearts of individuals, in the hearts of each one of us, the length and breadth of the country. Every single one of us has within us the same feelings and emotions, the same potential for good and evil as every other individual on this planet.

What we do with those emotions and the potential within us is in part what makes the difference. We can live for ourselves and our own families and give little thought to others or we can reflect the love, the compassion and the grace of our God on all that He has made and make a difference.

In Psalm 145, the Psalmist says: **The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made.**

How many of us can see ourselves in that verse? How many of us see ourselves as compassionate individuals? Do we look on the perpetrators of crime with compassion or judgement? How many of us are slow to anger? How many of us have the patience of our God? How many of us are rich in love? How many of us show compassion on all that God has made?

If God is within us, surely we should see some evidence of Him in our lives? If God is within us, surely we should see a reflection of His presence and His influence in our lives? Surely we should see some reflection of Him in our behaviour, in our reactions, in how we regard and treat others, in how we

view those who commit crimes as well as on those who are on the receiving end. None of us will do it perfectly but dependent on the grace of God and dependent on the strength of God, how well do we do?

Are we quick to judge others? Are we quick to lose our tempers? Are we aye ranting and raving about something or are we different from that? Do we look on others with compassion and seek to understand their lives and their actions? Do we have some inkling that there but for the grace of God go I?

Do we consider that some of those who commit crimes have learned from an early age to fight for survival at any cost and that they know no other way? It doesn't make their actions right but many of us were shown at an early age, another way. We were shown a way that respected our elders, a way that taught us that we weren't always right, a way that showed us that if we did wrong, there were consequences, a way that taught us the value of life, a way that taught us to treat others as we would wish to be treated ourselves. We were taught to love God and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. We may not get that right in every instance. We may fail miserably at times but at least we know that that is way to life and to peace.

I am utterly convinced that as long as we continue to live in a Godless society, we will see no improvement in the world or in the community in which we live. I am convinced that as long as God is pushed further and further away in our communities, as long as God is excluded from daily life by political correctness and by those who believe that faith should be kept behind closed doors with those who are that way inclined, without impacting on the rest of society, I am convinced that all we will see will be a steady decline in the standards people set for themselves within our communities.

I am not saying that all those who have no faith are bad people. I am not saying that those of no faith will all fall into crime. I am not saying that those who believe are better than those who don't. I have already said that we are all the same. What I am saying is that a Godless community is on a downward spiral and the faith community in Lochgilphead is the only community which can turn that around.

It seems like a massive undertaking but the Psalmist assures us that **The Lord is trustworthy in all He promises and faithful in all He does.** The Psalmist assures us that **The Lord upholds all who fall and upholds all who are bowed down.**

The Psalmist assures us that **The Lord is near to all who call on Him. He hears their cries and saves them.** Those words are the foundation from which we bring about change. Those words and promises are our starting point for stopping this downward spiral in our community. When we are bowed down with the weight of the world on our shoulders, God will hear our cries and save us. God will be near us when we call on His help to restore our community to one in which He is acknowledged.

It seems like an impossible task and yet back in the early 80s none of us ever imagined that the Berlin wall would crumble. That was in my mind as I

began preparing this sermon and so in conclusion, I remind us that the God we worship is the God, who in answer to prayer, brought down the Berlin wall. Surely we can trust Him to break down the walls which rise up in our communities, the walls of crime and of judgement, the walls of faithlessness and hurt, the walls of fear and division.

Let's continue to pray and to reflect the love and compassion of God in our community as best we can so that our community, in time, will be turned around and will reflect the love and compassion of our God to all who pass this way, to the glory of God.