

Sermon Carol service 2020

Play Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata

I want to focus on the word 'compassion' and I want to start by saying this, when Jesus came into the world he brought with him a new perspective, a new understanding of God. He introduced us to a loving and forgiving God, as opposed to a rather vengeful and punishing God as depicted in the Old Testament. And so it is not surprising therefore that underpinning everything that Jesus did and taught was this word 'love.'

Among the virtues encompassed by love are forgiveness, caring, tolerance, service and compassion. Of all these virtues, I believe compassion comes closest to expressing the true meaning of love in the Christian sense. I say that because compassion literally means 'to suffer together.' It is the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering (you could insert 'caring' there) and feel motivated to relieve that suffering (you could insert 'service' there).

Compassion is an emotion which enables us to step into another person's shoes. We understand how they feel, and from that position we are able to say something, do something that will give them a lift, that will make them feel better. And as we well know, when we are able to do that, we feel better ourselves. And now back to Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. Let me tell you how this beautiful piece was written.

Late one afternoon, Beethoven was visiting a cobbler to have a pair of shoes repaired. As he stood in the dingy workshop, he heard someone attempting to play a piano in a back room. He stood there listening because the person was trying to play one of his pieces, but not very successfully. Turning to the cobbler, he asked him, 'Who's playing that piano?'

The cobbler replied, 'My daughter but as you can hear she's not very good. She's blind and can only play from memory. Sometimes, when I can scrape together a few coins I take her to a concert, but that doesn't happen very often, I am afraid. And I cannot afford to send her to music lessons. It is a great pity really because her only real joy is music.'

Beethoven placed his shoes on the bench and said to the cobbler, 'May I go in and play for your daughter? You see, I play the piano and love music as well.'

So Beethoven joins his daughter at the piano. Gently and patiently, he rehearsed the piece she had been playing, going over each bar again and again, until she was able to play it through without difficulty. So engrossed had he become with his new pupil, he failed to notice that darkness had fallen, and that he was playing by the light of the moon filtering through the small window. Reluctantly, he stopped.

He said, 'I'm afraid I must go but I promise I will come back to give you further lessons.' As he got up to go, the blind girl reached out to touch him and thank him. 'What is your name, sir?' she asked.

'I am the man who composed the music we have been playing,' Beethoven replied. She gasped, 'Not Mr Beethoven! Not Mr Beethoven, the famous composer!'

'Yes, I am afraid so,' he replied gently, 'and I feel honoured to have been allowed to spend some time with you.'

Later that night, after retiring to bed, Beethoven thought about the little girl struggling to play the piano under almost impossible conditions. He recalled the room in which the piano stood and the moon shining through the window illuminating the girl's hands as she sought for the correct keys. As he thought about this, he became so filled with emotion that he could not sleep. Eventually, he got up and sat at the piano and let his feelings flow. That night Beethoven composed one of the great pieces of music he had ever written, namely *The Moonlight Sonata*.

Play the rest of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata

I think Jesus would like this story because it is about someone being motivated through their compassion, their feelings of care for someone less fortunate than themselves. That is the true meaning of love that Jesus brings with him when he enters our world and which should underpin our Christmas celebrations.

Jesus said, '*For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me.*' John 6:38. This tells us two things. Firstly, Jesus really does come from God. Secondly, God is a loving, forgiving God. This is the God reflected in the person of Jesus.