

The Power of Compassion

preached by Rev. Ted Tollefson Feb 3, 2019
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1. Compassion = The Golden Rule

The “Golden Rule” in its many forms is a universal moral principle common to most religions. This does NOT mean being mean to ourselves so we can be kind to others. The key word might be “as”: do unto others **as** you would do them dp unto you. Love others as you wish to be loved. It is an invitation to reciprocity that combines rule-driven and empathy-driven approaches to ethics. The Silver Rule (Do No Harm) offers a helpful corrective by forcing us to shift our attention from our own intentions to the effects of our actions on others.

2. Compassion = Moral Imagination

Compassion invites us to imagine ourselves in the “shoes” of other persons. To value their inner life as we value our own. The catch is that not everyone has this gift---up to 7% of the population lack it (so-called “psychopaths” or “sociopaths”). Many sociopaths rise to the top of political, corporate and religious organizations.

3. Compassion = Learned Behavior

Luckily enough, life is full of opportunities to learn about compassion. We can learn from people who are naturally kind. We can learn from those who don’t have a clue. We can be prompted by parables such as “The Good Samaritan”, songs like “Grandma’s Hands” or by proverbs: “*Before you judge another person, walk a mile in their shoes*”.

Link: [Bill Withers - Grandma's Hands - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?)

▶ 4:56 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>

4. Compassion = Accurate Empathy

To compensate for the errors or lack of “Moral Imagination” we can learn the art of “Active Listening”. We can learn to check what we think we heard and let the speaker correct us. This can create a “safe zone” to speak difficult truths and to get re-synchronized with our partner. There will be a workshop on “Active Listening/Accurate Empathy” sometime this spring.

5. Compassion = “Truth Force” or “Tough Love”

For those who lack empathy, don’t like to listen or are “hard-hearted”, we may need another approach. Gandhi called it “**Truth Force**” (satyagraha). More recently it has been called “**Tough Love**”. We don’t need to attack another person, but we do need to “**speak our truth**” and “**stand our ground**”. When we speak our truth tempered by kindness, it can mobilize the compassion of the powerful and the compassion of the powerless. This double activation releases tremendous non-violent power for change. It can “move the mountains” of ingrained prejudice, hatred and inequality, so we can begin again. As Gandhi predicted, the British did indeed leave India “as friends”.

