

Most who champion on-line chat rooms and message boards argue that such technology encourages community. The question, however, is just how healthy on-line community really is. Emboldened by anonymity, people often say things to others that they would never say face-to-face. Armed with a certain sense that "this isn't really the real world," people have little concern for the consequences of their actions or words. To put it simply: pseudo-, virtual community can often bring out the worst in us.

Consider the devastating story of Abraham Biggs.

The message board section of Biggs' favorite site, BodyBuilding.com, was his source of community—even *family*. The 19-year-old college student posted at least 2,300 messages, many of them chronicling his personal struggles. On November 19, 2008, after several messages that hinted at his desire to commit suicide, Biggs posted one final note, swallowed a medley of pills, and directed his on-line community to watch his death on a live video website.

What is especially horrifying is what investigators discovered after the suicide. Many in Biggs' on-line family had actually encouraged him to take his life. In fact when officers finally found where Biggs was located, 181 people were watching the video, many of whom were typing "LOL"—"laugh out loud"—on the screen.

In an interview with the *New York Times* about Biggs' death, Jeffrey Cole, a professor who studies technology's effects on society at the University of Southern California, said,

"[Online communities] are like the crowd outside the building with the guy on the ledge. Sometimes there is someone who gets involved and tries to talk him down. Often the crowd chants, 'Jump, jump.' They can enable suicide or help prevent it."

In the same interview, he later adds:

"The anonymous nature of these communities only emboldens the meanness or callousness of the people on these sites. Rarely does it bring out greater compassion or consideration."

When the Associated Press spoke to Biggs' father about the tragedy, he said, "As a human being, you don't watch someone in trouble and sit back and just watch."

... ..

Now let me ask you... Would such lack of compassion... shown toward Abraham Biggs... be considered evidence that the very fabric of our civilization is frayed... torn... and tattered... ?

... ..

One day a student asked anthropologist Margaret Mead for the earliest sign of civilization in a given culture. He expected the answer to be a clay pot or perhaps a fish hook or grinding stone. Her answer was "a healed femur." Mead explained that no healed femurs are found where the law of the jungle, survival of the fittest, reigns. A healed femur shows that someone cared. Someone had to do that injured person's hunting and gathering until the leg healed. The evidence of compassion is the first sign of civilization.

If Margarete Mead is correct... then we are living in society that is showing signs of movement away from being civilized. ... Now!... Should we sit back and be disgusted by what we have become as a society(?)... or should we be challenged... by seeing it as our mission field...? ... Too often – even as believers – we take the sitting back approach. About the only thing that we do is shake our heads... and comment every now and then to someone... *“Isn’t it just horrific...?!”*

Our passage this morning will lead us to the option of taking up the challenge... and it will also show us a very practical action that every one of us needs to take. ... None of us will be able to say any longer... *“Isn’t this horrible. I sure hope **somebody** does something... There is certainly nothing **I** can do...”*

The first part of our passage this morning shows us what compassion looks like. This will be followed by Jesus’ challenge for you and I develop and grow in the area of compassion for others. Then, third, Jesus will give us a very practical way to begin expressing it.

Author and Radio personality, Federica Matthews-Green, has written:

“The main evidence that we are growing in Christ is not exhilarating prayer experiences, but steadily increasing, humble love for other people.”

Our passage today verifies the truth of this statement. ... So let’s begin first by observing what compassion looks like... as Jesus models it for us.

Matthew 9:18-26

Mark and Luke say this man's name was Jairus (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41). They also tell us what kind of a ruler he was. ... He was the leader of the

synagogue. As such, Jairus was responsible for administration — looking after the building... supervising worship... running the school on weekdays... and finding rabbis to teach on the Sabbath.

Possibly he was the ruler of the Capernaum synagogue. That would mean Jesus and Jarius must have spoken with each other on multiple occasions — with Jarius' consent and by Jarius' invitation. ... But now... into the life of Jairus had come a great sorrow. His little girl was desperately ill.

It must have been difficult for Jairus to come to Jesus... since he was a devout Jew and the leader in the synagogue. ... The religious leaders were already showing their disdain for Jesus.

But Jarius not only comes to Jesus... but he knelt before Christ. ... One would fall at the feet of someone of much greater status (like a king)... or prostrate oneself before God. ... So... for this prominent man to humble himself in this way before Jesus... was to recognize Jesus' power in a serious way. ... This was unusual respect... Actually the ruler of a Jewish synagogue - worshiped Christ!

Look at the middle of verse 18... Matthew shows that the ruler's first words to Jesus were: "*My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.*" In other words... she is still alive when Jarius approached Jesus.

So... do we have a problem...(?) because we learn from the other Gospels (Mark and Luke) that at this point the little girl was still alive. When Jesus started to go with Jarius... the other Gospels explain... that messengers come and notified Jarius that his daughter had just died. ... So... who got it right? Is Matthew correct... or are Mark and Luke the accurate ones?

Perhaps all of them! ... (This may not be all that earth-shattering!) ... Maybe his daughter was barely hanging on and was on the very cusp of death... when Jarius left her in desperation to go and see Jesus. He may have assumed that by the time He got to speak with Jesus... she had already died. ... (Perhaps he thought that she was as good as dead...) Only when Jesus started to go with Jarius... did the messengers confirm that she had indeed died.

Matthew 9:19

Jesus quickly reassured the man and went with him. The Lord needed no urging. ... Jesus arose... and immediately followed him. ... I see this as a display of one of the characteristics of compassion. When compassion sees an obvious need – it doesn't wait. ... It takes immediate action. ... Would we see compassion in Jesus... if He would have said... *“Let me give this some thought Jarius. I'm pretty needed here. I'll give you my answer tomorrow...”* ... When you know the right thing to do... and you are able... but you delay from doing it... there probably is not much compassion... is there?

Two Sunday's ago... when my wife had that mountain biking accident... I moved her to some shade... left her bleeding profusely at the side of the trail... and rode as quick as I could to the Paulina Lake store to get help. ... Once I finished calling 911... an emergency-room nurse... who happened to be vacationing with her husband and grandkids... was walking by and over-heard me explaining to the 911 operator. When I got off the phone... she identified who she was... and asked me if I would like for her to come and help. ... But just think... If I knew that she was a nurse... and

if I then experienced her hesitating and thinking it over... (after all... she was on vacation with her family)... we might question her compassion. But she didn't. She acted immediately and ran to the place that I had told her where Patti was.

Compassion answers immediately. If you know the right things to do... but delay in doing them... you are lacking in compassion.

Are there matters that you are still contemplating whether or not you should involve yourself...?

Jesus had compassion. He acted immediately... and hope sprang up in the ruler's heart... .. But it was only to be dashed. There was an interruption... and I have to think how the distracted father must have fretted at the delay! ... Anyone with an ounce of imagination can picture the despair on this father's face... and read the new fears and frustrations that besieged his heart... when Jesus engaged in something else.

Matthew 9:20

Comparing other Gospel accounts of this miracle, indicate that the woman had a serious bleeding problem related to menstruation. ... Without modern day hygienic helps... this problem could also be very embarrassing... as well as physically threatening to the woman.

Adding to the social disgrace... was the spiritual disgrace. Her condition made her ceremonially unclean according to Israel's laws recorded in Leviticus 15:19-27 (especially note verse 25). Spiritually and socially the woman was an outcast. ... If she touched anyone or anyone's clothes...

she rendered that person ceremonially unclean for the rest of the day. Because she rendered unclean anyone she touched... she should not have even been in this heavy crowd. ... Many teachers avoided touching women altogether... lest they become accidentally contaminated. Thus she could not touch or be touched... she had probably never married or was now divorced... and she was marginal to Jewish society.

Here then was a miserable woman... whose case was in many respects as bad as that of a leper. ... She had lost everything worth having in life... the ability to worship God... comfort and support from the religious community... family care... social standing... and financial security.

The other Gospels add details regarding the woman's financial loss. She had spent all her money trying to find a cure. Luke, who was a doctor, said that no physician had been able to heal her (8:43). Mark, looking at the case from a layman's point of view, was more caustic; he said that she "had suffered many things of many physicians... and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse" (5:26). The doctors had taken her money, treated her inadequately, caused her unnecessary pain, built up her hopes, dashed them, and left her worse than they had found her. Now she made up her mind to come to the great physician who never lost a case and never charged a fee.

She was now virtually penniless and had reached a point of quiet desperation. Her only hope at restoration was in Jesus. She did not presume that he would need to touch her or speak to her. If only she could touch Him, could touch even His clothes, she believed that she would be made well again.

She worked her way through the crowd and came up behind Jesus. She believed that she only had to touch His robe (the fringe) and she would be healed. She may have feared that Jesus would not touch her if He knew her condition... that Jesus would not risk becoming unclean in order to heal her. Or she may have feared that if her condition became known to the crowd... the people who had touched her would be angry at having become unclean unknowingly. ... The woman knew she could receive healing... but she tried to do it as unobtrusively as possible.

The woman who caused the interruption to Jarius' help from Jesus... intended to do no such thing. ... The last thing she wanted was to draw attention to herself. All she wanted was to creep up to Jesus... experience His blessing... then melt quietly and quickly away into the throng.

But Jesus took time to minister to her in such a special way.

Matthew 9:22

The woman was seeking to lose herself in the crowd when Jesus called to her. Seeing the fear... alarm... and dismay on her face... He said something very unexpected... but very beautiful. He called her... (What?) "Daughter." ... This woman had been ostracized by her family... but He put her in His family.

Here is another thing about compassion. It reaches out to meet more than just a physical need. ... The easiest thing for Jesus to do... would have been to simply let her melt away into the crowd. ... But her soul was hurting

because of all the rejection... and Jesus made use of the opportunity to tenderly treat her soul.

When you show compassion... the minimum (or the easiest remedy) is not simply done. The whole person is ministered to. ... Jesus had healed her... but there was more to be done. ... For the sake of Jarius... Jesus could have kept right on walking and allowed the woman to disappear. But He knew that she needed more. ... When you act with compassion – on behalf of missions... for example... do you only do the minimal...? ... When a friend is hurting... do you seek to minister to them fully(?)... or with minimum effort...?

The woman had lived for twelve years in fear of public revelation and embarrassment and criticism. ... Attempting to disappear into the crowd after the healing... showed that she probably feared a reprimand from Christ. ... But the words of Christ to her... would be most welcomed. (Verse 22) "*Take heart... daughter*" is not a reprimand or cause for any kind of embarrassment.

Instead of the feared condemnation... she is complimented for her faith.

From the Divine standpoint a compliment about your faith... is about the highest compliment that you could receive. ... Isn't it interesting that men live for compliments - about their achievements...? ... Many earthly achievements do not impress God... but faith does... and eternity will honor faith... not fortune or fame.

At first... Jarius may have resented the woman... because she kept Jesus from getting to his daughter... before his little girl died. ... But I believe

Jesus stopped and interacted with the woman... not only for her sake... but also for the sake of Jairus. ... Jairus came and bowed before Jesus... but perhaps he needed his faith to be bolstered for the long-run... when his friends show their disapproval for his actions. ... The fact that God has helped others... is a powerful motivation to trust Him more. ... Sometimes God delays with us... in order to teach us that we are not to be so selfish in our praying... that we cannot wait on the Lord. Part of our continued education about our faith is coming to a fuller understanding that He is never late. ... The delay... no doubt... was faith-building for Jairus.

By the time Jairus and the Master arrived at the house, it was crowded with mourners, for everyone in town knew the ruler of the synagogue. Flute players were there to lead the crowd in mourning. Several professional women mourners were required even at the funeral of the poorest person; the funeral of a member of a prominent family like this one would have many mourners. The cathartic release of mourning included shrieking and beating of breasts. Because bodies decomposed rapidly in Palestine, mourners were to be assembled, if possible, immediately upon someone's death; in this case they had gathered before word even reached Jairus that his daughter had died.

Matthew 9:24

Jesus took it all in with one glance. "Go away!," He said. In other words, it was a forceful - "Get out!" ... If the mourners were startled by that... they were even more astonished by what He said next: "The girl is not dead but sleeping..." Matthew recorded the reaction of the crowd: "They laughed at him." ... Luke tagged on these words... "*knowing that she was dead*" (8:53).

When the Lord had arrived... the people were lamenting. Two minutes later they were laughing — at Him. ... This derision was very pronounced. **First**, it was cruel. The word translated "*laughed*" means to "deride, to jeer at... to ridicule" ... It was gross disrespect to say the least. ... **Second**, it was continuous. The tense of the verb "*laughed*" is the imperfect tense... which means it was continuous scorning. ... Not satisfied to make a few derisive remarks... they simply kept on making them continuously.

But Jesus ignored their rudeness. He simply evicted them all... He bundled them unceremoniously out of the house.

Now let's observe something else about compassion. Often an act of compassion will receive ridicule from those who are watching. But compassion will still act — every bit as decisively. ... If you decide that you are to act with compassion... do it even if you get ridiculed.

Jesus ordered the scorers to leave and He forcefully helped them leave. They were not permitted to witness the great miracle. Great spiritual privilege was denied them. When one disrespects the things of God, that person will forfeit much blessing... and will experience the judgment of God.

When Jesus said that she was sleeping... He was simply stating the fact of the condition of death — the body in this state is spoken of figuratively as sleeping. ... The soul... however... does not sleep. It is always active. What Christ said was a different view of death than the traditional view and hence it was unacceptable to the professional mourners... and so they laughed at Christ. ... The arrogance of the human mind is such that

anything not understood by the human mind about God... is rejected and scorned.

Jesus went in and held her hand. Touching a dead body meant to become unclean. But touching the dead girl confirmed once again that to Jesus... compassion was more important than the letter of the law. ...Jesus took the girl's hand in His... issued a command... and the dead child stood up. Jesus had authority and power over humanity's greatest enemy—death.

Compassion sometimes takes precedence over following the letter of the law... or the rules and traditions of man.

Matthew 9:27-31

Two blind men followed Jesus... repeatedly shouting the phrase... "*Son of David, have mercy on us!*" (In the original language of the New Testament... it is clear that they did not just say it once. They kept shouting it.) ...They were addressing Jesus in the messianic terms of His royal lineage. They demonstrated faith in Who He was. ... even though they showed such faith... and begged Jesus to have mercy on them.... Jesus apparently ignored them. Jesus did not respond to these two unhappy men as he walked to (what was probably) Peter's home.

Doubtless the two men could not understand why Jesus did not stop on the way and heal them... but they were made of sterner stuff than to give up. The good steel of their faith had been tempered... and made strong by their need.

Still echoing their persistent cry... the blind men forced their way into Peter's house. ... Jesus finally turned to them. Having allowed them to pour out their hearts... He put them to the test (verse 28): "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

When performing His earlier miracles... Jesus had not been so insistent about testing the petitioner. But now that proofs of His claims were accumulating... He demanded a more definite statement of faith. From the blind men... the answer was forthcoming instantly. They had no doubt. If He could raise the dead... He could cure blindness.

Matthew 9:32-34

Verse 32 – “*As they*” (the two blind men) “*were going away... behold, a demon-oppressed man...*” ... No sooner did one case get solved than another snowed up for help. But though wearied by many cases... Christ had compassion to help another case.

The reaction of the observers to this miracle was twofold. ... Some praised it and some criticized it. Times have not changed much. We should expect that every work of compassion... will be met by both praise and criticism. Do not expect pure praise when you show acts of compassion.

Matthew 9:35

Jesus went everywhere and to all classes of Jewish people. He made His way to the cities where great numbers of people faced the problems of urban living. Jesus went to these centers of government... finance... higher education... industry... art... sports... science... religion... entertainment—

and crime. ... He also went to the villages... (the little out-of-the-way hamlets where a man's world was his cottage... his cow... and his field of corn.) ... Those places were just as important to Jesus as the cities. Nobody was too sophisticated for Jesus... and nobody was too simple.

Compassion is blind to the status of its recipient.

Jesus healed everyone who came His way with a need. Yet... Israel's leaders were hardening their hearts... and the common people were still undecided. Amazed(?) – yes... but committed as followers(?) -- not yet.

The time had come for Jesus to increase the scope of His ministry. He needs others to do the same – to have compassion.

Matthew 9:36-39

Jesus looked at the crowds and felt compassion for their human condition. In a sense... His heart went out to them as He observed their hopeless plight. ... While He was knowing their physical condition... (and busied Himself with healing them)... we see here that most of all... He pitied them most for their spiritual condition.

They were weary... not in the sense of being physically tired... but in the sense that they were weary of mind. They were perplexed by the circumstances in which their lives were immersed. ... They were scattered... not in the physical sense of their location... but in the sense of the direction of their lives. They did not know which way to go.

The Lord saw lost people as having *no real goals*. They were "scattered abroad"—like sheep. Sheep are neither strong... nor smart... nor swift. They are somewhat stupid... having a propensity to go astray and wander

aimlessly farther and farther away. Lost sheep have no goal... no instinctive sense that will bring them back to the fold. Jesus saw lost people as sheep wandering here and there through life... with no sense as to where it all leads and where it all ends.

He also saw them as having *no real guides*, "as sheep having no shepherd." What did they have? They had the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and rabbis. But those men were as lost as the people they were attempting to lead.

The world is the same today. People blinded by communism and humanism are wandering in a spiritual wilderness. Millions will perish... cherishing the false creeds of Buddhism... Hinduism... and Islam... or wander into eternal darkness... listening to false teachings within our liberal churches who do not teach the Word of God.

But the real problem is not the presence of false religion and teaching. It is a lack of compassion among God's people. ... Verse 37 shows how Jesus put His finger on the main problem.

Matthew 9:37

To the shame of the church... this is a chronic problem that still exists. Every Christian organization (and effort)... lacks adequate laborers. Few people are willing to get involved and commit themselves to service for God. ... There are not enough people who are compassionate enough. Most everybody is too taken up with their own concerns to follow in the Lord's compassionate steps.

But Jesus put forth a very practical solution... that everybody in this room can do. What is the Lord's solution to the problem?

Matthew 9:38

We are to implore the Lord of the Harvest to move in the hearts of His people – and lead people into a Christ-continuing ministry of compassion.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "Here's the harvest, now go!" ... Instead... He says, "*Here's the harvest, now pray.*" Jesus will eventually get to the "go" part, but first His followers must be on their knees... asking and pleading with God to send out workers. Have you ever done this in earnest...?

This is precisely what we should be doing in our churches as we seek to send people out regularly into this dark world to proclaim the gospel. We should actually pray for people to leave... (on mission!) ... God *loves* to answer prayers like this. Our churches ought to be sending bases of laborers for the harvest of souls. No one is to be a spectator.

Jesus asks those who are His faithful disciples to plead with God to send workers into the vast fields of humanity... and reap the harvest... which He has been preparing. ... Jesus is inviting you and I to get involved in the process of what He is already doing. Jesus asks us to share the task with him — to share His compassion... to follow His instruction to pray.

(LISTEN!) God is only all-too-willing to grant our request. But I must issue this warning. Let the petitioner beware! You may be the person that He sends.

Dare we deny the command of our Lord?

Do we realize the gravity of eternity? Far more important than sports... money... sex... or success in this world... there are people around us today (and every day) who are eternally lost. ...Do we sense the urgency? Do we see the world with the eyes of Jesus? ... As fun as the things we fill our lives with *are*... have our primary pursuits... pleasures... and possessions... overshadowed what is really important...?

Christian philosopher Peter Kreeft (as quoted by Lee Strobel) said - On my door there's a cartoon of two turtles. One says, "*Sometimes I'd like to ask God why He allows poverty, famine, and injustice when He could do something about it.*"

The other turtle says, "*I'm afraid God might ask me the same question.*"