

1. Tapping into God's Compassion this Lent

This reflection has been contributed by Jessica Stone.

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Traditional images for Lent often depict desert or wilderness, but this year, the image I'm carrying with me on the journey to Easter morning is this one, which for me has become a reminder of God's compassion. Thirteenth century theologian Meister Eckhart said, **'Whatever God does, the first outburst is always compassion.'** We see this happen when Jesus heals the blind men in Jericho

("Moved with compassion, he touched their eyes"), when he feeds the multitudes with a few loaves of bread and some small fish ("I have compassion for the crowd" he says), when the father in his parable welcomes the prodigal son home ("his father saw him and was filled with compassion"). Time and again, we see that Jesus "had compassion on them", or "was moved with compassion", or "filled with compassion". I'm really grateful that that's how it's phrased, rather than, "And Jesus was such a compassionate person that he . . . cured, or fed, or forgave". Undoubtedly, Jesus was—is—compassionate because we know that compassion is part of God's nature. "For the Lord is compassionate and merciful" Ecclesiastes tells us. But Jesus' life and stories invite us to participate in the kingdom of God. **He shows us how to do it.** So it's significant, at least to me, that his acts of compassion are not attributed to a personality trait, something you could test yourself on with a helpful online personality quiz. "Which of the twelve disciples are you?" asks a recent quiz making the rounds on Facebook. You could be St John (kind and caring), or St Thomas (intelligent and argumentative), or any of the other 12 and their associated characteristics. But seen that way, compassion can seem like a burden, something that, if not helpfully built into your personality profile already, is a virtue you must try, and many times fail, to achieve. Jesus, however, was moved or filled with compassion, in what seems to be a spontaneous response to the suffering before him. I like to imagine that he was tapping into an infinite reservoir of God's compassion *that's available to us, too*, at all times and in every place. **Maybe we don't have to rely on our own reserves because there is an open and eternal invitation to receive God's compassion and to take part in it.** Participating in God's compassion is not a burden, in no small part because it involves the relief of experiencing God's compassion towards *us*. So in this season, which offers us 40 days to try—and inevitably, sometimes fail—to discipline ourselves, I'm recalling the surprising splash of God's limitless compassion.

What images are speaking to you this Lent?

How is Jesus inviting you to participate in God's compassion?