Because we are human, we have an uncanny ability to take good things and turn them into bad things. We can take delicious food and turn it into gluttony; We can take pain relievers turn ourselves into drug addicts, and we can take movies and turn them into *Legends of the Fall*. There is not a virtue that we cannot turn into a vice. I thought about this today, not just to be gloomy, but because of what we hear in the Gospel where we read, “When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.” The word that got me thinking about slouching toward Gomorrah was compassion. Compassion basically means to have concern for the misfortunes of others, even though in the original Greek it meant to be moved to one’s bowels, because the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity. I had never thought of myself having terribly empathetic bowels but who am I to go against the Greeks. But taking our bowels out of the equation the problem that exists with compassion is when we humans apply it too narrowly. We have compassion for those who are like us, or those who believe like us or those who smoke the same cigarettes as we do. We have compassion on this group but despise another group. But look again at what it says that Jesus did. It says he saw the great crowd and he had compassion on them. All of them, not just the ones with good hygiene and minty fresh breath. By Jesus’s action he is telling us that we are all deserving of compassion, because we have all had misfortunes at one time or another. Sure there may be degrees. My problems are certainly much less severe than that of the Uighurs in China or a child caught in the middle of the war in Syria, but that does not mean that I have gone through life unscathed and the same goes for all of us. If we want to have a misfortune Olympics we could probably find a champion, but that is not how Christ interacts with this crowd. Instead it says that he cured their sick. I am assuming since it was a crowd, that some may have had chronic and debilitating diseases while others may have had an ear ache or an ingrown toenail, but Jesus felt compassion for all of this.

When we look out at the crowds or those we see in public we need to remember to act as Christ did. Not to judge or perform triage to find who is most deserving but rather to love all of humanity. Christianity starts with the love of Jesus. The love that died on the cross for the very same people who put him there. And that love of Christ is to work in the same way as Obi-Wan Kenobi describes the force, it should flow through us. A love that loves others not because of who they are but despite who they are. And imitating this kind of love is hard because it is costly love. It is love that requires us to love those people who are not very lovable and, in the case of today, requires us to have compassion for those we might not feel like having compassion for.

And here is the thing in understanding compassion, it is not a sentimental feeling. Its not a feeling where we get to stick out our lower lip or shed a little tear for the little boy whose mother surprises him after returning from deployment. Compassion is not just a moment in time, rather it is a way of recognizing what is common in all of us. When Jesus looks at the crowd his compassion is driven by his humanity and his love because he recognized in them the hurts and sorrows that all of us carry around. He recognized their need to be loved. In the Wall Street Journal this past weekend there was an article by Heather Lanier about raising her daughter, who has a rare genetic disorder known as Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome. In it she talks about the struggles, but also the beauty in raising someone that is not considered “normal.” She writes, “A better life isn’t one that steers clear of the most pain, managing to arrive at the end with the eulogy, *He had it easy,*or *She was the least scathed person I know.*This belief in the virtue of the ‘happy’ and suffering-free life sterilizes and shrinks us, minimizing what makes us most beautifully human.” It is in peering into these places of pain and suffering that we connect on that most human level and it is on this level where we see the beauty that is found in the difficult and the uneasy. That is what compassion is. It works in the opposite way as objectification where we fixate on only those attributes which we find agreeable. It says I see the hurt in you and it speaks to me in my brokenness as well. Henri Nouwen described this phenomenon with the phrase the wounded healer saying, “Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.”

I won’t end with a soliloquy on our current state of affairs, I will leave that up to you. What I do want to say is that there can probably never be too much compassion. The more we are able to look at everyone and see the commonality between us and them the more human relations will be repaired and the more we can act like Christ in this world. Compassion unites us as a human family so that we all may be God’s this day and forevermore.