

St George's Alongsiders' – Tend Talk (6.5 minutes)

Many of you've had the opportunity to watch a TED talk... Well, today, the Walters want to offer you a 'TEND' talk instead. But before we begin, we'd like to say a huge thanks to Josh and Jeremy and to you all for giving us the privilege of sharing about 'TENDING' and this fourth Mark of Mission.

In a moment, Maree and Evan will share about our recent trip to Cambodia, but before they do, it seemed 'good to Dad and the Holy Spirit' to 'set the scene' on what it means to '*tend*'. You see the truth is, '*tending*' and 'responding to human need through acts of loving service', is at the very heart of who God is. The very nature of the Trinitarian God we follow, is this idea that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit 'eternally 'tend' to one another's needs, in a posture of mutual, loving service. And it's this picture of our Triune God - that we find in Scripture – all the way from the Genesis of Creation to Our Servant King, Jesus, that sets the pattern for how we are to 'tend' in this world, as His disciples. This call to 'tend' is so important to Jesus, it's THE thing that will divide people in the 'Eternal Judgment' as described in Matthew 25, as He calls us to feed the hungry and thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned – for 'whatever you and I do for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of His', Jesus says, 'you did for me.'

Writing in the 1500's, Saint Teresa of Avila offers with searingly clarity our responsibility to 'tend':

"Christ has no body now but yours....Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world...Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

But with all the needs we face, so many centuries past, what does this 'tending' look like?

In Matthew Chapter 8, Jesus sets an example of what it means to tend, when Jesus encounters a suffering 'leper' – suffering not just physically, but spiritually and relationally, as well. The word '*leper*' used here, covered a whole range of skin diseases, and wasn't confined to what is diagnosed today as *Hansen's disease or leprosy*. But whatever his skin condition, truth is this '*leper*' should've been no-where near that crowd and certainly nowhere near a Rabbi. The mosaic Law required sufferers to live in isolation and were supposed to ward anyone off by shouting, 'Unclean!' Scholars say it was illegal to even greet a so-called leper in an open place, while priests often ran and hid themselves upon seeing one in the distance. The truth is, the plight of this 'man with leprosy', is like all those who go unnoticed. They're the guy at the traffic light who holds up his sign in need

of food; or the woman struggling with mental health, rummaging through our city's bins. But what we often forget is simply this: While these people might be invisible to us, *no-one* is invisible to Jesus. In light of this, Jesus tends this man by doing something no-one else does. Jesus 'tends' to this man, by *noticing* him. Jesus *looks at and listens* to this man who comes and kneels before him. It's a small thing, isn't it? But to those of us, who've ever felt 'invisible' at church or at a spouse's Christmas work function, you'll know exactly the kind of effect Jesus has on this man. By noticing him, Jesus restores this man's dignity and mana, as someone made in the image of Himself - God, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Question is, who are the people in our orbit, that we tend to over-look and who is Jesus inviting us to *notice*, afresh?

We then hear how Jesus does the unthinkable, and '*reaches out and touches him*'. Everyone who watched Jesus on this occasion, must have held their collective breath. In a world without facemasks and steri-gel, the decision of a Rabbi to physically touch a person with leprosy, seemed like lunacy! Transmitted through droplets from the sufferer's nose or mouth, Jesus was risking catching a disease that may well have de-sensitized his nerve-endings, made him vulnerable to undetected cuts and wounds, that may well have become infected, causing Jesus' own flesh to rot.

But Jesus' risk is not just *physical*. See, Jesus also risks 'spiritual and relational' infection. According to the Jewish Law, *anyone* who had a skin disease or had touched a person with leprosy, like Jesus, became separated not just physically from their loved ones, but were also kept from Temple Worship, too, until proven 'ritually clean'... Jesus was putting his own ministry and life in jeopardy - for the sake of this leper before him...

But that's why the risk Jesus takes is SO important... By reaching out and touching this leper, the gift of healing that lies within Jesus is being released and poured out, meeting powerfully this man's deepest human needs. Without this risk-taking, there simply is no gift of healing to be had and this man remains stuck... Here, Jesus sets an example for us and reminds us through 'tending to human needs', that 'His Kingdom love is a more powerful force than disease and being disowned... By taking a risk and lovingly offering the gifts God has given each of us - to the people in our orbit - we are joining Jesus in 'tending' to people's human needs, through loving service, and in the process ushering in God's Kingdom on earth, as it is in Heaven... We may not have the gift of healing, but as Mother Teresa says, we can 'do small acts with great love'. In light of this, Maree and Evan will share what 'tending' to human need, through loving service looked like in Cambodia...