

*A sermon preached by David Wilbourne on Trinity 16 at the 8 am Communion.*

Jesus' heart went out to that mother at Nain in her utter grief. The English translation fails to do the Greek justice, σπλαγχνιζομαι, splangchnizomai, literally gutted, onomatopoeic, since you wrench your guts saying it!

As Christ's disciples we are called to weep with those who weep, to be gutted by their plight. The word crops up in six other places in the Gospels, and nowhere else. Three times in Matthew and Mark where Jesus is σπλαγχνιζομαιεδ gutted by the crowd, lost like sheep without a shepherd, and miraculously feeds them. We are called to pity the crowds, crowds of refugees, crowds of Brexiteers, whatever, to pity them and feed them. Every church is called to be a food bank, to feed a confused world on Christ.

The word crops up in two parables, Matthew's parable of the two debtors, where the king is *σπλαγχνιζομαιεδ* gutted by the man in massive debt to him, who throws himself at his feet, begging for mercy. Ironically that debtor once forgiven goes away and guts some poor chap who merely owes him a few pounds. Forgive us as we forgive. Don't hoard forgiveness, let it flow.

In Luke's parable of the Prodigal Son, the father is *σπλαγχνιζομαιεδ*, gutted when he sees his wayward son, just a speck on the horizon, making his weary way home. Think of God, always on the look out for you when you are lost, moved to compassion at your return.

Apparently those who have a child run away from home always leave a light on in the porch, 24/7, aching for a return. A bishop carries a crook as the sign of the Good Shepherd, always wanting to bring lost sheep home.

The word crops up in one other healing, when Jesus is *σπλαγχνιζομαιεδ*, gutted, by the deformed leper begging before him. gutted by the separation that all disease, all prejudice brings.

Lost crowds, lost sons, lost debtors, lost lepers, lost widows: a whole spectrum of misery which our Lord is *σπλαγχνιζομαιεδ* by, gutted by. As Christ's followers we too can be *σπλαγχνιζομαιεδ* genuinely gutted by them. We are told that the Good Samaritan simply came to where the wounded Jew was.

That is the supreme example of incarnation, coming to where people are and empathising with them, *σπλαγχνιζομαιειν* with them, not a patronising, superior pity, not polite pity, but gut-wrenching pity in the spirit of Christ. We may be rubbish at other things, but we can do the pity, we should do the pity.

‘The groaning of creation wrung out by pain and care, the anguish of a million hearts that break in dumb despair, O crucified Redeemer, these are thy cries of pain. A may they break our selfish hearts and love come in to reign.’ A hymn by Timothy Rees which found me in my teenage years in far away Hull, as Christ finds us this morning, is gutted at our plight and calls us to be gutted for all his lost children.