

## The Fruit of the Spirit is... Kindness and Goodness

Galatians 6:7-10

Luke 6:27-35

Taking kindness and goodness together this morning. They overlap quite a bit, and we'll hear both words & concepts in this teaching from Jesus in Luke:

### Luke 6:27–36

27 `But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup>bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup>If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. <sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. <sup>31</sup>Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 `If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup>If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup>If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup>But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. <sup>36</sup>Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

This is the word of the Lord.

There has been a lot of talk about kindness these past few years, about being kind and expressing kindness—and for good reason. We see it on signs,

billboards, bumper stickers on cars. I even have a mug with a picture of a bee on it, and below the bee is says “kind.” Get it? Bee kind!

On the surface, kindness and goodness seem simple and straightforward. Maybe boring; perhaps, in some peoples’ minds, even weak. Be kind. Do good. At the very least, don’t be a jerk. But kindness and goodness aren’t boring at all. And, they aren’t weak at all. Kindness and goodness actually require great strength. Because...

The biblical word “kindness,” for starters (*chrestos* in Greek), is defined as “love toward those who are unkind.” Or, as we heard in our reading: love shown to enemies, to the ungrateful. Jesus says that God is kind even to the wicked! And to that I say, “Good for you, God. You go for it!” But then I re-read this teaching, and take it in, and realize that Jesus suggests that he wants us to be kind in the same way, and do good to difficult people in the same way.

Given this teaching, and others like it, we might say that kindness and goodness are expressions of love toward those who don’t deserve it—or at least we believe they don’t deserve it.

Kindness toward those who *deserve* it, or whom we already love, Jesus says, is not really kindness—that’s basic human instincts at work: we naturally love our family (those family members we get along with, at least), we naturally

love our friends, we naturally love those who are good to us. And as we heard in our reading from Luke, Jesus said that if we love those who love us, or do good to those who are good to us, what's the big deal about that? That's easy, and everyone does that.

Kindness, rather—a God-like kindness—is love expressed toward those who don't deserve it; **yet**, *who need it*. That's what kindness is. The apostle Paul says this in Romans 2:4: *it's the kindness of God that leads to people repentance*. It's the kindness of God that leads people to repentance. Not, it's guilt-tripping that leads people to repentance. But kindness. Which means, kindness isn't showed exclusively to people who deserve it, but to those who need it. Even our commonly used phrase “kill them with kindness” assumes that the person we're extending kindness to is someone we'd like to, well, kill. We're just doing it with kindness.

Parenthetically, kindness, as it appears in the Bible, almost always follows patience. It follows patience in the fruit of the Spirit list, and it follows patience in the list of the attributes of love in 1Cor.13: love is patient, love is kind... And in 2Tim 2:24 where Paul is discussing leadership in Christ's church, he says: “a leader must not be quarrelsome, but patient, and kind to *everyone*.” Which is why one

commentator defined *chrestos* (kindness) as, “the ability to act for the welfare of those who are taxing your patience.”

So, there is something about kindness that flows from patience—when we can slow ourselves down, and take time to think clearly and not just react (that is, when we can be “long-tempered” and exercise patience), we will be more apt to act with kindness toward people we have a difficult time loving.

Given this understanding of kindness then, as love expressed to the undeserving or those who are difficult for us to love... as a fruit of the Spirit, kindness is something we will need to pray for help with, because it is something that probably doesn't come naturally to us. Therefore, it must be a *fruit of the Spirit* in our lives and not just something we try to muster up enough willpower to do because we're supposed to. We simply can't muster up that strength on our own. We need to pray for it, remembering that everything that Jesus *teaches* us to do, he also *supplies the strength to carry out*. What he's asking us to do in loving enemies isn't easy to do. At least not right away. But it's something that, as we walk with Jesus and learn from Jesus, and as we practice it, kindness becomes a bit more reflexive over time because of the Spirit of Christ at work in us, building our reservoir of inner goodness.

Last year I picked up a good book titled, *The War for Kindness*. It's kind of ironic that the author uses the word "War" in a book about kindness, but I'm sure his publisher wanted this excellent book to grab our attention. Mission accomplished! The title also suggests that we're in a battle for the soul of our society. What sets this book apart from others that encourage kindness as simply a moral or spiritual imperative, is that the author, Jamil Zaki, has research and scientific data that prove that kindness and goodness can rewire peoples' brains, and that empathy can be learned, and that kindness can change the culture of organizations and communities.

He tells stories of people fighting for kindness in the most difficult of circumstances. For example, a former neo-Nazi now working to extract people from hate groups. Former inmates discussing novels with the judge who sentenced them. Washington State police officers changing their culture to decrease violence among their ranks. And hospital nurses working together to find ways to increase empathy, not just with patients and families but with the corps of nurses so they don't burn out.

And it won't surprise us to learn that this effort to build kindness and goodness and empathy into lives and systems comes from spiritual and religious principles. We heard it in our readings this morning from Galatians and from

Luke. And just about every major religion in the world has kindness as a foundational practice. Remember what the Dalai Lama said, “Kindness *is* my religion.” And for many in our society, kindness is their religion too. We just need more people to be religious in this way to create positive momentum and change.

Even if it isn’t a spiritual or religious thing, we need more of it!

Just for fun, one young author of children’s books, Alicia Ortego, is helping kids get on board with kindness. She published a children’s book called *Kindness is my Superpower: A Children's Book About Empathy, Kindness and Compassion*.

A Catholic priest whose spiritual reflections have blessed me, in telling the story of his childhood years, said: “When I was growing up as a Catholic boy in Kansas, we viewed all Protestants as heretics who were going to hell. But then I met a few nice Methodists, and I found out they thought I was going to hell too! It’s just laughable.” They became friends, learned from each other, and helped each other change and grow.

And that’s what kindness will do. Remember, again, Romans 2:4: it’s the kindness of God that leads to repentance. Not *the judgment of God* leads to repentance, or *the punishment of God* leads to repentance, or *a lecture from God* (with finger wagging) leads to repentance. But the *kindness* of God. Kindness changes people. So, we don’t *kill* people with kindness, we *bless* them with

kindness. We honor them, we offer them the possibility of being changed and transformed, just like we—hopefully—have been changed and transformed by kindness. Jesus says (in a fairly startling statement if you think about it), God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked, and somehow (with God's help) we are to learn to imitate that behavior. Because that's how people can be changed.

Again, Jesus teaches us to show kindness to the ungrateful and the wicked, not because he approves of their behavior and wants us to. But because it provides an opportunity for them to experience God's love, just like we have experienced his love, and for them to be changed as we have been changed by God's love. It reveals God the Father's heart and becomes a witness, whether or not they respond positively to it. How they respond is not our main concern; we don't control outcomes. Our job is to be kind and gracious and loving, with God's help, and let God settle the outcome and do the transforming work. But it's really the only way to provide the opportunity for someone to be changed. And, to make the world a better place.

When we talk about loving enemies and doing good to those who don't deserve it, the question will inevitably arise: Who is my enemy? Good question! It seems pretty clear from the Scripture that when Jesus talks about loving an enemy and showing kindness to the difficult ones in our lives, he assumes it's

someone we have human contact with, or have the ability to have contact with. Yes, there are enemies of *the state* around the world. Perhaps you feel like a certain politician or elected official is an enemy. But for the sake of initiating kindness, and doing it to someone who tests our patience, we're talking about someone we have contact with, or have the *ability* to have contact with.

And it needs to be said that sometimes, someone we believe is an enemy isn't really an enemy at all. Our imaginations make them into an enemy because we make all kinds of assumptions without interacting with them. And that's another reason why initiating kindness is so important, and not labelling people. Because when we can take the time to interact with someone who taxes our patience, we may discover that they aren't as horrible as we thought they were. Or, maybe they are that horrible 😊. Love them anyway! Do good; be kind.

Story from Charlottesville riots (6 years ago): An African American woman (documentary journalist/filmmaker) Deeyah Khan, who, while she was there, carried water bottles with her to give to people while she was doing her documentary work. It was hot in Charlottesville and she wanted to show support in a simple way by giving a drink of water to those who needed it.

And during the protests she saw a man named Ken Parker, who was a white nationalist and a grand dragon of the KKK. She saw that he was languishing from



heat exhaustion, and she gave him a bottle of water and stayed with him and talked with him until he felt better and could receive some medical attention.

That small act of kindness began a transformation. Her kindness tweaked his mind and heart. The two of them continued to talk over the months, and at the same time Ken Parker got to know a neighbor, William McKinnon, who unbeknownst to him was the pastor of an African American church. They developed a relationship, and Ken Parker noticed that “something was different about him.” Long story short, Ken Parker renounced his affiliation with the KKK and white nationalism, and now worships at McKinnon’s church. A former white nationalist worshipping at an almost all-black church! All because of one simple act of kindness toward him, by an African American journalist.

Ken Parker said about Deeyah Khan: “She was completely respectful of me the whole time. And so that kind of got me thinking: she’s a really nice lady. Just because she’s got darker skin and has different beliefs than I do, why am I hating these people?”

Now, this story went public and I was able to read it and share it with you because it was circulated in the media several places. But think of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of acts of kindness and of doing good that aren’t written about or circulated in the media, but take place every day. And think of how many acts

of kindness are done, and the person who performs the good never finds out what effect their kindness had on someone. I can think of people over the course of my life who showed kindness to me, who I never saw again, and they'll never know how much their kindness affected me.

This is why, as the apostle Paul says in the reading from Galatians, let us not grow weary in doing what is right; and as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all. Because we never know how one small act of kindness can change someone.

The Gift of Love (based on 1Cor.13)