

Kindness. In our handout, Reverend Keller defines kindness as “An ability to serve others practically in a way which makes me vulnerable, the ability comes from having a deep inner security.” I will take that a step farther and say that the security needed to be kind in a vulnerable way, comes from the Holy Spirit in us.

When I was prepping for this sermon, I was thinking of examples of kindness from my own life experience. And it was good to recall many of the kindnesses I have both received and also offered to others. It was also an opportunity to repent for the times I missed an opportunity to be kind. But I kept coming back to a specific memory, because it was the perfect example of someone who bestowed kindness to me because they had empathy for me. I’ve heard many of you say that you have first responders in your family, and so I really wanted to share this story of public service.

Many years ago, when I was 19, I was the survivor of a home invasion and sexual assault. When the police were called to my apartment complex in the middle of the night, they found me in the laundry room with a knife, and one of the officers was very nice and gentle. I moved back home with my folks, and about two weeks later, I was driving to work in a completely different part of Cincinnati. I was on a city highway that was a lot like 99W. A young woman fell from the sidewalk right in front of my pickup truck. Of course, many people stopped, the ambulance and police were called then, God sent Kindness to me again. The responding officer to the accident scene was exactly the same fatherly police officer who had found me in the laundry

room. He took one look at me and said, "Oh it's you - you poor thing, Oh, I am so sorry", and he took me in his big arms. His confidence and familiarity with me, made the crowd go away, but that was not the only kindness he showed. When another officer asked for my keys to move my pickup, he said no, that she has to move it. Then He looked at me and said, "If you don't get behind the wheel and drive away from this today, you may never drive again. You have to have courage". And though it didn't seem like it in that moment because I was so terrified, but it was very kind, because it was for my own good. Later that evening, he called me at home to let me know the woman was alive, that the lab reports had come back and she was full of drugs, and no charges would be pressed. He gave me very good legal advice to not try and contact her or see her, in order to avoid a civil lawsuit. The woman and her family did not know my name, and the police were not going to release it. And then, he said he was very sorry for all that I had been through. He told me he had a daughter my age, and would it be okay if he talked to my Dad He then repeated all of that day's info and also all he knew of the prior incident, so that I wouldn't have to talk to my Dad about that. You see, he understood the ways that trauma shuts down the mind and memory. You see, the love in this man's heart for his own daughter spurred his vulnerable kindness to me. It was his empathy that prompted his kindness.

Society focuses on “being kind” as an action, but kindness comes from a spirit, an empathetic spirit cultivated in the heart, and kindness is not based on action alone. Many “nice” actions and words have been done with a selfish motive....Bless your heart.....let me share with you in love.....are two phrases that come to mind as nice words that may be followed by unkindness. But being kind can never be selfish when empathy is present. When empathy is present, our kind actions always want to help the recipient.

Even though kindness isn't all about our outward actions, it does come out in what we say and do. If we are relying on the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of kindness deep within our hearts, then we will more easily choose kindness and it will more often become our natural reaction. So, today we are going to look at 5 bible stories where Jesus chose to show kindness, and then explore a few where Jesus really wasn't nice at all, but He acted in Kindness for all of humankind.

1.Healing the Leper

Matthew 8:1-4

When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." –

Because leprosy was contagious, lepers were considered outcasts in Jesus' time. They lived separately and were considered "unclean" and "untouchable." The houseless are treated that way today – we don't like to see them and avoid them, when possible. But Jesus, taking pity on the leper, healed him of his disease. He didn't see the man as a leper but a sick human who needed his help. *Jesus taught us that kindness should go beyond social stereotypes.* We are to look at where societies outcasts are coming from and understand their circumstances. We must see that the outcast has the same life goals that we do – to be loved and healthy. Only then can we develop genuine empathy and compassion, which leads to kindness. Jesus had empathy for the outcasts and marginalized because He was also misunderstood. Jesus will be kind to us when we feel outcast. Jesus Strong and Kind

2. Preaching to the Gentiles in John 4

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews, do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” – John 4:4-14

Xenophobia – the dislike and prejudice of people from other countries, is one of the biggest problems the world has today. But this prejudice of foreigners has been going on even in Jesus’ time. The Samaritan woman is a foreigner; in the eyes of a Jew, she’s a gentile. These two races don’t associate. It’s frowned upon to even talk to a gentile. And this woman was at the well in the middle of the day because she was an outcast. All the other women went when it was cool, not at noon. Thus, by preaching to a Samaritan woman, Jesus broke societal boundaries and showed us that kindness is universal. The church of Christ is a world church. People from every race, every nation, worship at the throne of Christ and we were all created for God’s purpose. As a Jewish man living under Roman

rule, Jesus knew discrimination. Jesus will always be kind to us when we are discriminated against – Jesus Strong and Kind

3. Dining with a Tax Collector

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was. But because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” – Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus may not have been a convicted criminal, but in the eyes of the Jews, he might as well be. In Jesus’ time, tax collectors often abused their powers to line their pockets with the people’s hard-earned money. We don’t have any politicians like that today, do we?

Yet, Jesus never hesitated to dine with him. He didn't care if others would see him associating with an outcast. He didn't care if people would hate him for it. Jesus knew that we have all sinned, we have all fallen short. Jesus will always empathize with us when we feel less than good enough.

4. Forgiving Those Who Hurt Him in Luke 22

While he was speaking, a crowd came up, and the man called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

When Jesus' followers saw what would happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him. – Luke 22:47-52

In spite of his imminent death, Jesus still found it in him to heal the man who arrested him. Even while hanging on the cross, he still managed to ask His Father to spare the people who hurt him because they didn't know what they were doing.

Forgiving those who've done us wrong is one of the greatest acts of kindness – not only for others but for yourself too. You give yourself the opportunity to heal. Forgiving does not mean that we drop boundaries or allow abusive behavior to continue. We can forgive and keep our boundaries. Jesus was forgiving His tormentors even as he hung on the cross and Jesus will always forgive our sins when we ask. Every Time.

5. Showing Compassion to the Sick

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

“Who touched me?” Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.”

But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.”

Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he told her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.” – Luke 8:40-48

In this story, Jesus could have reprimanded the woman for touching. In those days, that woman could have been stoned to death for being unclean in that crowd. Jesus could have reprimanded and “put her in her place.” Yet, he chose not to. Instead, he called her daughter – a term of endearment. And he treated her as a daughter, the same as my angel of Kindness did to me. Jesus saw and understood her struggles and desperation, which led her to risk her own life to seek His healing. She was clearly scared because she was trembling. I doubt she was treated well by the people near her, after she explained her uncleanness. But can you imagine her relief when Jesus showed her kindness and compassion instead of reproach and correction? I know that relief so well - that is exactly what that kind police officer did for me.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. To merely be *nice*, but separated from truth, is not the fruit of kindness that Paul is writing about in Galatians 5. In fact, right before Paul writes in vs. 22 about the Spirit's fruit of kindness, he writes in vs. 12, "I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves." Ouch. That was not very nice of Apostle Paul, but it was the truth for those faced with either the knife of mutilation from man made rules or leaving their church and faith.

Jesus was complex, and because it's easy to confuse kindness with with being nice, let's look at a few times when Jesus was absolutely not nice. I am using excerpts from a blog called "All Set Free", by a young writer named Matthew Distifan and I very much appreciate the way he writes with a direct tone, and so I am using his words. He speaks

"Jesus was all about love, was all about meeting people where they are at, all about listening and not judging others. And look, to some extent, Jesus *was* all about those things. Sometimes. And in some contexts. But he was also a rabble-rouser. He wasn't always nice. And I'm guessing he wasn't all that liked by a large group of his contemporaries". Take, for instance, that time Jesus had no interest in listening as He laid into a group of Pharisees and "teachers of the law." It's not so nice. Go ahead and read Matthew 23 for yourself. All of it. It's not pretty. He calls religious leaders – those who in today's world would be pastors, celebrity Christians, worship leaders-hypocrites. He calls them a "brood of vipers." Whitewashed tombs. He

basically says they are all fake and care for nothing except how they look in front of the crowds. He also says they are “blind fools.” Blind fools! Not nice. Not “just love each other, maaaaan!”

Then there’s Luke 11. In this chapter, Jesus is quite insulting. In fact, one of the lawyers in the crowd tells him so. To his face! Luke 11:45 “One of the lawyers *said to Him in reply, “Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too.””

What does Jesus do? He doubles down. He says – Woe to you lawyers also. He charges them with all the blood of the prophets since the foundation of the world. All the blood! Since the foundation of the world! Wow, Jesus! Where’s all that hippie love? Where’s that “It’s all about meeting people where they are at” stuff? Nowhere! Instead, it’s “ya wanna go?” time.

Of course, who could forget the time he flipped over a bunch of tables in protest of the sacrificial system that was at the center of his religion? And look, I don’t think Jesus was being violent in that situation but, in typical prophetic fashion, he *was* being dramatic. He was making a scene. He had had it. And people were gonna know it.

Sometimes you gotta call things like you see them. You gotta call out systems of oppression wherever you see it. Sometimes the Jesus thing to do is stand your ground and stand up for injustice, even if it’s not gonna make you very popular among the so-called religious leaders”. Well said Mr. Distifano, though I am reminded that the way of Jesus calls us to relationships of

non-violence and peace. We are to resist using violence even in retaliation for violence used against us.

Which brings us back to Pastor Chris reminding us– the Jesus way is the Middle way. When we follow the teachings of Jesus, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ And ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’, when this is our Truth, then our actions and words will bring forth the intentions of kindness that God has for each of us to Honor and Love the Lord our God, and to live in peace, and be kind to ourselves, and to each other. We will produce the spiritual fruit of kindness as we abide in Jesus, the ultimate example of Kindness. And when we center our lives in Jesus, we are able to experience His loving kindness. His loving kindness overflows in our lives and gives us the confidence to serve others in a vulnerable way, the way that police officer did for me so many years ago. Most of all, may we hold Jesus in our hearts as the model of kindness. Jesus acted in vulnerability, to die on a cross in order to reconcile humans to God, to give us eternal life, all because of His great love, and His great faith in God to resurrect Him.

Let Us Pray

Lord, please open our eyes. Please let me see those around me that are in need of our kindness. Compel us to listen to them, to hear their needs. Give us the hearts to be interested in their troubles and show us the ways I can help". Amen

