

Week Six: Love Kindness

Sunday, May 6, 2018

by: Rev. Roger Lenander

Titus 3:4-8 (The Message)

“It wasn’t so long ago that we ourselves were stupid and stubborn, dupes of sin, ordered every which way by our glands, going around with a chip on our shoulder, hated and hating back. But when God, our kind and loving Savior God, stepped in, he saved us from all that. It was all his doing; we had nothing to do with it. He gave us a good bath, and we came out of it new people, washed inside and out by the Holy Spirit. Our Savior Jesus poured out new life so generously. God’s gift has restored our relationship with him and given us back our lives. And there’s more life to come—an eternity of life! You can count on this.”

Depression is a terrible feeling to experience. It robs one from energy to care about one’s self and others. We are hard on ourselves for feeling that way. We reflect on what brought us to these depths. Those who have gone through those times as a community or nation know the hopelessness that sometimes feels worse than death itself could be. Sin robs our lives personally and as a community. Its destructive reach knows no boundaries. Thanks be to God whose loving kindness enters into our depths and brings the light of hope and salvation in Jesus Christ.

When the prophet Micah tells us that God requires us to love kindness it is not about our acts of kindness. It is to love the kindness of God that washes us clean and breaths into our hearts and minds the mercy and grace of God. Scriptures tell us, “We love because God first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

When we empty our self and allow the loving kindness of God to fill us we are on the way to becoming a new creation in Christ. We are strengthened for those times of trouble and despair. We suffer but do not lose hope for the loving kindness of God keeps us in the unbreakable peace that comes from God.

O God, your lovingkindness is better than life. Let me live daily in the cleansing waters of my baptism, be filled with your generosity, and moved by your compassion and grace. Amen.

Monday, May 7, 2018

by: Misty Coyle

mer·cy /'mærsē /

compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm.

Once upon a time, in a small village in Kenya, there lived a young boy with his step family. Due to the scarcity of water in the village, the young boy awoke early every morning, carried his pot and headed for the stream with the aim of fetching water for himself and his step family. Sadly, for him, he alone had this task as a routine every morning and evening to fetch water from a distant stream while his step siblings were given other lenient tasks or even none. Yet, the young boy bore no grudge against his step family, loved them and carried out his task, diligently.

On his way back from the stream, he met an old man resting under a tree who begged for water to quench his thirst and he gave the old man. He met an elderly woman who begged for water and he gave the woman. This happens almost every time as he comes back from the stream; meeting people

who beg for thirst, yet he gave them despite his step mother's torture on him for fetching half-filled pots that wouldn't even be enough for the family.

One day, he couldn't bear the torture from his step mum, so he swore never to give anyone water, but on his way back, he met a strange looking man who begged him for water. The strange man lay by the road side with an injury. The young boy remembered his vow – never to give anyone water – but contemplated for a moment and then gave the strange man some water.

When he got home, his step mum noticed the half-filled pots, and again pounced on him – this time with more cruelty. As she was beating this young boy, there was a knock on the door. It was the wounded strange man – a mail deliverer. Apparently, he came from the town with a letter for the young boy. A letter containing a scholarship with additional cash gift for the young boy and would have died on the way if not for the boy's help.

story by: Emmanuel Aghado

You can't help but be happy for the boy in this story. He received justice when he least expected it. Did you notice at the beginning of the story, he loved his family despite the beatings and a task that took him away from school and friends. Every day he passed people needing water and still showed kindness/mercy to those in dire thirst. The NIV translation of the Micah 6:8 verse uses the word mercy instead of kindness. Both words are interchangeable in this text.

Mercy/kindness is an extension of God's justice: every single person has the right to experience God's grace and love. Mercy looks beyond the actions of an individual and sees the state of a person, and rather passing by them, it urges us to extend our hands. During hard times in the last couple of years, my family, friends and some strangers looked past my situation and showed me kindness. Knowing that some of my actions were the result of brokenness within myself that could only be healed by mercy/kindness. When someone experiences the power of mercy/kindness, especially from Christ, the feeling may compel them to show mercy and kindness to others. To love God is to love others and to care about the state of their lives. By showing mercy/kindness to all of those around us, we are participating in God's justice. As Frederick Buechner once said, *“Compassion is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It's the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too...”*

Heavenly Father, let the joy of my heart reflect the joy of your mercy. Let my actions and words speak of your justice, grace, and mercy. Amen!

Tuesday, May 8, 2018

by: Juel Pierce

One of my favorite books in the Old Testament—in fact, in the Bible—is Ruth. At its center is kindness, and the kindness begins with Ruth, who is not an Israelite. Naomi, the mother-in-law of Ruth, has been left alone (so she thinks) in the land of Moab, where she and her husband and two sons emigrated to because of a famine in Bethlehem, their hometown in Judah. There her husband and sons died, and she feels she is left alone.

But kindness intervenes. As she is getting ready to return to Bethlehem because the famine is over, she plans to return as a homeless, resource less widow. But her daughter-in-law Ruth insists on going with her, leaving her own home and family. “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God,” she tells Naomi.

And when they come to Bethlehem from Moab, Ruth is an immigrant, and she does what immigrants do—she works at whatever she can do to feed herself and Naomi. (She also speaks with an accent, if not a different language, and is known in the community as a foreigner.) And like most poor women, she works without rest.

But the kindness she has shown Naomi is also shown to her. Boaz, a rich landowner in whose field Naomi has directed her to glean, takes her under his wing. He learns of the kindness of Ruth to Naomi, and gives her protection, as her role in the community as an immigrant woman without a husband makes her extremely vulnerable to assault and sexual harassment.

Naomi sees what is happening, and becomes a matchmaker, and Ruth and Boaz end up marrying and having a child (after a suitably suspenseful plot twist). And because of this kindness all around, the son born to them is the grandfather of King David.

Kindness doesn't always come naturally to me. If I'm tired, I'm cranky and not kind. But Ruth reminds me that as a follower of Jesus (a descendant of Ruth, according to Matthew's gospel), I am called to love kindness and share it with all those around me.

Loving God, thank you for the story of Jesus' ancestor Ruth and her kindness. May our lives be marked by the kindness that you have shown to us, through Jesus. AMEN.

Wednesday, May 9, 2018

by: Jim Pierce

*One of the scribes came near . . . and asked [Jesus], 'Which commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, 'The first is, 'Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' **The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'** There is no other commandment greater than these.'* (Mark 12: 28—30, NRSV, emphasis added)

*God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and **what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?** (Micah 6: 8, NRSV, emphasis added)*

I love it when people are kind to me and to the people I believe they should be kind to. That's a no-brainer. So, you can bet this isn't what Micah means when he says, "love kindness." Nope. Instead, he is telling you and me to get out there and do it. Practice kindness, do kindness, devote yourself to living kindness. Those words are hard to hear. There are lots of folks toward whom I'm just not so much into practicing kindness. I bet that's true of you as well.

It doesn't matter which group or faction or political party you belong to, which side of an issue you're on—in our community, the state, the nation, even in our church. There is someone, some group on the other side, "those damned (you fill in the group)," that are just flat wrong, mean-spirited, hateful. They are so easy to blame, so easy to be angry with, so easy to be afraid of, but not at all easy to practice kindness toward. After all, isn't the whole problem that they are not practicing kindness. Don't they need to start first?

Well, as a matter of fact, no, they don't, not that they don't need to love kindness as well. It's just not your job to fix them. You can be sure God is working on that, so leave them to God. Micah asks, "What does the Lord require of you?" not, "What does the Lord require of others?" Micah answers, "The Lord requires you, the one reading this, to love kindness, do kindness, live kindness. The Lord expects you to do this most particularly with those people you don't want to be kind to at all."

It goes along with doing justice, treating others with fairness and equity, being concerned for their wholeness and well-being. You can't really do justice if you do it unwillingly, begrudgingly. Doing justice flows out of your practice of kindness which reaches out to listen to the other, to hear the other's hopes, fears, needs. Doing justice flows out of your practice of kindness which asks, "How can I help?" It flows out of your practice of kindness which prays not that others get the punishment they deserve, but that they might experience grace."

I don't know about you, but I need to pray about this, a lot!

Gracious God, whose loving kindness to me knows no limits, help me today to show that same kindness to others, especially those I don't want to treat with kindness at all. Amen

Thursday, May 10, 2018

by: Phil Hornbostel

[After the death of Saul and Jonathan] David asked, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and he was summoned to David. The king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "At your service!" The king said, "Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?" Ziba said to the king, "There remains a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet." The king said to him, "Where is he?" Ziba said to the king, "He is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lodebar." Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir son of Ammiel at Lodebar. Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance. David said, "Mephibosheth!" He answered, "I am your servant." David said to him, "Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you yourself shall eat at my table always". He did obeisance and said, "What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I?"

Then the king summoned Saul's servant Ziba, and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. You and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him, and shall bring in the produce, so that your master's grandson may have food to eat; but your master's grandson Mephibosheth shall always eat at my table". Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so your servant will do". Mephibosheth ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons. Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica. And all who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's servants. Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he always ate at the king's table.

II Samuel 9: 1-13

As Easter people, the prophet Micah calls us to "love kindness". Not just to do kind things but to actually *love* kindness. How do we do this? How can we love kindness? David was the first of our Bible authors to *combine* this concept, as he found inspiration in God's lovingkindness and sang of it in over a dozen Psalms. It is love manifest in action. It simply isn't enough that we say we "love our neighbors" or "love our environment" or "love our church family", if there is no action behind it. David's love for Jonathan is conveyed in his reaching out to Jonathan's crippled, impoverished surviving son. David had every right to ignore the house of Saul, having survived a manhunt by Saul, as well as at least one assassination attempt from Saul. But David realized that there was a time for war and a time for peace; a time for hating and a time for loving. And he had reached a point in his life where it was simply time to reach out to Mephibosheth to show *lovingkindness*, not just love, and not just

kindness. It's a difficult thing to do sometimes, and we aren't good at it. But we can continue to try to do this as much as we are able, to convey the love of God, for all those with whom we come into contact.

And in those rare moments when we do this, when love and kindness fuse together in one action, and the recipient understands that this is the love of God in that moment between two people, those are the moments when we feel the love of God in our own hearts. And guess what? It is indeed contagious, and both giver and receiver want to feel it more and more. And so the kindness and love are shared by all God's people moving forward.

Jesus, thank You for loving me so much that You gave Your life for me. Keep me mindful of this greatest gift, when opportunities arise for me to share my meager gifts in a display of loving kindness, that my desire to share stays strong, in my weakness. And give me opportunities to spread the love of God throughout my life, so that I can be an instrument of Your peace. Amen.

Friday, May 11, 2018

by: Jeff Langdon

Micah 6:8 "God has shown you , O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? You are to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

As I am writing this, in the past hour I have received 3 phone calls from individuals cold calling me to sign up for a Medicare supplement... I don't turn 65 until November. In the past week I have received too many calls to count. I have had to hang up on these individuals.... I have ignored phone calls... some of the calls are from people who claim to be from the government and they have chosen a plan for me. I have had to be "not kind" to them. And here I am trying to write something on Kindness.

Now let me think about kindness.

Being kind is not simply being nice. Being nice is being polite. Being nice is asking someone if they are hungry. But... Being kind is deeper. Being kind is like going out of your way. Being kind is offering food to someone before they even ask for it.

We live in a society that is focused or obsessed with the individual...getting my own way. I think that in reference to the words that the prophet Micah wrote... **loving mercy or kindness is seeking the good of others or acting for the good of others or thinking about the good of others.**

Have you ever spent time with someone who is unpleasant to be around because they are always finding fault with everything and everyone even when things appear to be just fine? Or in their discussions, everything is about them. Now think about the kindest person you know. What is the difference between them? What is it that makes that other person so kind. I bet that you would describe that person as caring, showing humility, listening, willing to go out of their way for others.... In other words, that person is likely "other focused" in many areas of their life.

That is what Paul is writing to the Corinthians... "Love is patient, **love is kind**. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Micah writes that you know what God desires from you.... **Do Justice, love kindness, and walk humbly. What God desires from us is our love and showing our love to others.**

God, you have made known to us your desire for us. Help to reflect that love that you first showed us, in the way we do justice and love kindness in world. Help us to not only be nice but to be kind to all we encounter. Amen

Saturday, May 12, 2018

by: Rev. Roger Lenander

Isaiah 54:10 (New Revised Standard Version)

*For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the Lord, who has compassion on you.*

The kindness of God is not just for our benefit in our relationship with God. It is also a characteristic that is active in our relationships with others. YEARS AGO I attended a workshop on the topic of "Laughter in the Workplace" presented by Tim Crowley, a professor at Missouri Western State University. One exercise was to self induce laughter for one minute. It was hilarious and for some painful. It was painful, because laughter was not part of their daily activity. What we learned is that making laughter a part of our daily activity was healthy in all areas of our life. The ability was in each of us. For some it came easily. For others it was more work to introduce it into their daily activities. For all it was an active ingredient to living healthy in the world.

The kindness and love of God is the one constant in our life. It is the visible action in our lives to others that reflects God's steadfast love towards us. Sheila Gilbert, founder of Food For Kids, said that when 2 boys get into a tussle with one another she resolves it by having them hug one another. "There is something about the hug that removes the differences that caused them to fight and restores them to act kindly towards one another," she explained.

God requires us to embrace the world with the kindness that comes from God. The kindness of God is known to us in the cross of Christ. In it God chose to act in an embrace that ended the hostilities between us. Where in your activities today can you exercise the kindness of God to others?

God of compassion, lead us to act with your kindness that brings restoration, healing, and forgiveness. May your kindness fill this world and transform the hearts of all. In Jesus name. Amen.