



FIRST
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THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: KINDNESS

Micah 6:6-8; Acts 9:36-42

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Dr. Lewis F. Galloway

We have a friend in North Carolina whom we have known for over 40 years. Through the years, I have seen her practice kindness to countless people – doing simple things like listening to a troubled friend, giving a ride to someone in need, babysitting for a neighbor, or helping with a project. For over ten years, she cared for her mother-in-law in her home with a kind and uncomplaining spirit. She saw it not as a burden, but as a privilege. If we were to pause for a moment, each one of us could think of a person we know as someone of great kindness.

Some years ago, the soon-to-be Football Hall of Famer Peyton Manning received a letter from an Indiana native, Kari Bollig, who had advanced breast cancer. She said of the letter she wrote to him, “It was very personal. It was very heartfelt, and I never thought anything of it other than I wrote it and sent it,” she added. “I didn’t even know he would get it.” He received it, read it, and invited her to a practice and to sit on the sidelines at a Denver game (www.washingtonpost.com/2015/09/17).

His kindness and concern brought joy and a respite from cancer to her. It was not an isolated act for him. His kindness toward others has brought many folks closer to experiencing the love of God. Whether we are unknown or well-

known, kindness matters. Kindness changes lives. Kindness is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in us.

In the book of Acts, we read about many followers of Jesus who manifested the gifts of the Spirit. They were the saints of the early church. They were not famous, rich, or powerful. Their lives touched and inspired the lives of others. Luke tells us about a woman named Tabitha in Aramaic, Dorcas in Greek. In both languages, her name means gazelle. She might have been utterly forgotten except for her kindness. She was known in the church for her goodness and works of charity. She used her talents as a seamstress to make clothes for those in need. When she fell ill and died, the distraught community sent for Peter to do whatever he could for her and for the grieving community. Through their tears, they showed him the clothes she made for others. With the healing power of Jesus, he brought her back to life. She is remembered not only because Peter brought her back to life, but because of her kindness.

The prophet Micah declares that kindness is one of the three most important expectations that God has for us. The prophet asks, “What does the Lord require of you?” The answer is “to do justice,

to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). The Hebrew word behind the English word *kindness* is *hesed* (or *cheded*). It is a frequently used word in the Hebrew scriptures and it is often translated as *steadfast love, mercy, or kindness*. We hear the familiar refrain from the Psalms: “The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 103:17). In Ephesians, Paul speaks of the “immeasurable riches of God’s grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (2:7). Micah declares that what God wants from you and me is not a flashy, over-the-top display of piety or religiosity, but simple justice and kindness. God’s kindness inspires and directs our kindness.

What does kindness look like? Do you remember the horrible flooding that hit Columbia and the midlands in 2015? It was called “a thousand-year flood.” In the Southeast, we expect flooding, especially along the coast, from severe rains and hurricanes. This time the flooding came in the center of the state when the storm literally sat over the city and dumped several feet of water on the whole area. Rivers and streams swelled, dams burst, and parts of the city flooded where flooding was thought to be impossible. Many homes were

destroyed; many people did not have flood insurance. In my home church in Columbia, 75 homes were flooded; 25 became uninhabitable. What does kindness look like? The church I had served in Columbia before moving to Indianapolis opened its doors to the community, provided a dry place for children to play and people to gather, welcomed folks to take showers, and served hot meals to neighbors.

Kindness has a face. When you invite a neighbor to worship with you next Sunday, when you look a stranger in the eye and have a real conversation with that person, or when you take an elderly neighbor shopping, you are practicing kindness. Nathan Foster, the author of *The Making of an Ordinary Saint*, writes about his spiritual journey. Foster found that practicing the spiritual disciplines to be both frustrating and joyful. I once heard him speak about the simple things we can do to practice kindness. He talked about how he has stopped endlessly circling the parking lot, looking for the closest parking space. Instead, he parks far away from the door, enjoys the walk, and leaves the best spaces for those with children or heavy packages who might need those premium spaces more. Last week in our adult Sunday School, one of the members talked about how she avoided the drive through lanes at stores, restaurants, and pharmacies. Instead, she goes into the store in order to speak to

the people who serve the customers, to get to know them, and to express appreciation to them. These may seem like insignificant things, and, on one hand, they are. Yet, they are also ways of remembering to practice kindness in the large and small moments of life. When we take the time to come to know others, to hear their stories, to walk in their shoes, to see life from their point of view, the Spirit comes and plants the seed of kindness in our hearts that will bear fruit in the lives of others.

How do we practice kindness in an unkind world? This past week we hosted the second CAST camp for children who live in area motels. These children know what it is to live in an unkind world: family violence, poor nutrition, bullying at school, physical abuse, parent in prison, neglect, little money, addicted parent, and family instability. Volunteers from our congregation come together to welcome the children, teach them life skills, assess their needs, provide nutritious food, engage in the arts, tell Bible stories, take them on adventures in the community, provide spiritual and emotional support, and introduce them to new experiences. These volunteers share their life skills and their professional skills as a teacher, speech therapist, artist, psychologist, recreation leader, nutritionist, and counselor. They used their gifts to plant the seed of kindness in the hearts of these boys and girls. Through the week,

they watched the seeds of kindness grow and flourish as the children held the door for each other, shared their supplies, offered compliments, took the hand of a younger child, and volunteered to do things for the group. They watched the seeds of kindness grow in these children, giving them a new way to live in an unkind world.

There is a kind of mean-spirited Christianity at large that focuses time and energy on judging the sins of others and excusing their own, insisting that people follow a set of narrow rules, drawing lines about who is in the kingdom and who is out, and only welcoming people who share their same prejudices. Personally, I am done with mean-spirited Christianity. One of the most important witnesses we can make to our faith is practicing kindness in the name of Jesus. People want to see Jesus in us; not just hear us talk about him.

We keep the communion elements on the table in our worship services to remind us of the goodness, generosity, and kindness of God. God provides for our needs. Out of the overflowing love and grace of God, we are called to care for the needs of others here and around the world: children and families in our community, refugees at the border, hungry children in Haiti, older adults living alone with no family. In our worship today, we lift to God the needs of a hungry,

troubled, violent world. We look at the bread and wine on the communion table and we remember how God, out of the boundless depths of divine kindness, has fed us. The kindness of God inspires us and calls forth from us acts of kindness. We are fed spiritually and physically so that we might share Jesus, the bread of life, with others. God is kind so that we might be kind to others.

Kindness has a human face. We adopted our oldest child, Allison, when she was a little under two years old. Over the years we got to know her birth family and we enjoyed a wonderful and meaningful relationship with them. When Allison was in high school, her birth grandmother died after a long illness with cancer. We went to her funeral in a Presbyterian church in North Carolina. It was a modern sanctuary. All around were signs of her grandmother's handiwork and creativity. The left side of the sanctuary was glass. Beyond the curved glass wall was the winter garden which she had planned, planted, and tended. Her casket was covered with a star of David quilt which she had made for the church as an Advent Banner. On the walls were other decorative quilts that she had created and made. In the reception hall, there were three life-size wise men that she had also designed, and hand painted. Her friends pointed all these things out to us. Her name could have been Tabitha. Even as

we grieved with her family and friends, I felt like we were surrounded by the signs and evidence of her kindness.

What does the Lord require of us?
To do justice, to love kindness and
to walk humbly with our God.
Kindness has a human face. When
people see us, may they see the
immeasurable riches of the
kindness of God. Today in
response to the word of God, we
sing:

We are called to act with justice
We are called to love tenderly
We are called to serve one another
To walk humbly with God