

The Fruit of the Spirit – Session 6

Kindness

As Christians we must be kind to others. That's especially true in these present times of covid-19 induced distress and hardship. We should be concerned for the welfare of others and do all we can to be kind to them even if we are taken advantage of. The fact that there is potential for people to use us or be dishonest with us must not prevent us from doing acts of kindness. Jesus said:

“33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners’, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:33-36 NIV)

and Paul wrote:

God is kind he said through the prophet Jeremiah:

“..... I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:24 NIV).

God's kindness should encourage us to continue in kindness even if we are taken advantage of, by treating others as God as treated us not punishing us as our sins deserve but freely forgiving us. Love is not only patient it is kind, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.” (1 Corinthians 13:4 NIV).

As we shall see in a few minutes when we look at the parable of the Good Samaritan, kindness is very closely related to compassion.

The famous missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, was asked to go to the home of an extremely poor woman and pray for her because she

was ill. In those times many religious leaders charged for such acts, but the woman's family knew that Hudson Taylor would not charge. When he began to pray for her he felt uncomfortable because he had a coin in his pocket that he knew would be of great help to her in her poverty. As he knelt to pray he hesitated, thinking he should give her the coin. Yet he resisted because he had only enough food at home for two more meals. He needed the money too. But the conviction that he should give his coin wouldn't go away, so he gave the woman the coin. As he prayed he felt great freedom and encouragement. We should seldom resist an urge to be kind and compassionate.

The fruits of the Spirit are more than good attitudes or traits, they are evidence that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. The Holy Spirit doesn't merely teach us or lead us into love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control – the Holy Spirit *is* all these things.

Kindness has been described as 'goodness in action' and 'benevolent affability'. The Greek word for kindness is *chrestotes*. As Christians we must be *chrestotes* people. Those who know us should be able to testify that we are kind.

Kindness is not only compassionate it takes action. Consider the parable Jesus told:

"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him,

passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37 NIV)

It's a wonderful parable and I'm itching to talk for hours about it, but don't worry I'm going to resist that temptation. If anyone would like to know more about this and other parables, I'm more than happy to send you my lecture notes on the parables of Jesus – just ask me.

It's a story that was completely relevant to the context of those times. As regards location, Jerusalem is in the mountains, 2,500 feet above sea level. Jericho is in the Jordan rift valley, 800 feet below sea level. The road between these cities was about 17 miles long and was notorious for its bandits and travel was perilous. It's a road that has been notorious for bandits even in the 20th century. So a man is attacked and beaten on this road. This man is clearly a Jew, although the parable doesn't say so, it's his *need* that's important, not his *nationality* or his *status*. A priest and a Levite, who were probably intended to represent the expert questioning Jesus, pass him by and offer no assistance. A man who is half dead – verse 30 – may well appear to be dead and the priest and the Levite might have feared being made unclean by contact with a corpse, although since they are leaving Jerusalem they can't have had pressing religious duties to perform. Also under Jewish Law, priests had an obligation to bury a neglected corpse of a Jew. The stark reality is that neither of them is prepared to lift a finger to help this man. As priests and Levites they are used to being evaluated on the basis of their position and ancestry rather than their actions.

Yet in verses 33 to 35 it is a despised Samaritan who has compassion on this Jew and he is not even a Holy man, but a travelling merchant. Actually the Greek word used here for having pity or compassion “*splanchnizomai*”, is very vivid and is often used to speak of God’s compassion for humanity and His kindness to humanity. It speaks of a gut wrenching feeling from the deepest part of who we are.

The care that the Samaritan provides is not a model of moral obligation but of exaggerated practical love grounded in compassion and kindness that risks much more than could ever be required or even hoped for. He stops on the Jericho road to assist someone he does not know in spite of the clear danger of doing so. He gives of his own goods and money, freely, making no arrangements for reciprocation – just as Jesus taught - as we saw in our earlier reading from Luke chapter 6. In order to obtain care for this stranger, he enters an inn, itself a dangerous place; and he even enters into an open-ended monetary relationship with the innkeeper. This hated Samaritan models God’s expansive, exaggerated, unmerited, costly love for us all. God had compassion and mercy on us helpless sinners and at enormous cost sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. That’s a much more costly compassion and kindness than even that which was shown by the Samaritan.

Jesus was not detached, distant or indifferent to the pain he saw in people’s lives. He saw their need as an opportunity to help and show God’s love and power. When he saw the funeral procession of the widow of Nain, he was moved by her tremendous sorrow:

“12 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." 14 Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!"” (Luke 7:12-14 NIV)

Compassion without action is worthless. Like faith without works it is dead. We must do something to make a difference. We all know of people or situations where more kindness is needed. First on our

agenda should be our families, then our Christian brothers and sisters and then the whole of the rest of the world. Kind people are sensitive to the needs of others, as Paul wrote to the Philippians:

“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:4 NIV)

This kindness is not necessarily financial (although it may often involve that). As with the Samaritan it may start with physical and emotional support and later extend to financial help. We must also offer prayer and just be there. We can also offer encouragement.

Many of the believers were initially afraid of Paul because he had previously persecuted Christians. Barnabas, however, saw what God had done in Paul’s life and worked to get him accepted by the Christian community. Barnabas’s name portrayed his nature, he was a true son of encouragement.

Of course, true kindness isn’t always giving people what they want. For example, we shouldn’t always give young children what they ask for. In the same way God doesn’t always give us what we ask for.

In our competitive world today, many people view kindness as a weakness. It is not. It is powerful. Those who want to be Christian leaders must have kindness. No matter how good our preaching or teaching, or how popular we might be, without kindness we can’t be real spiritual leaders. Paul wrote to Timothy:

“And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.” (2 Timothy 2:24 NIV)

We all have lots of opportunities to be kind to people. Look out for those times and do something. It doesn’t necessarily have to be huge. In his book *Lines above Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth said “That best portion of a good mans life, his little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.” Think about it for a moment who around you could use your help encouragement or a little of your time?

John Wesley wrote: “Do all the good that you can, by all the means that you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all

the times that you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”

The Good Samaritan was probably busy and had plans just like those who passed the injured man by. But, he didn't do what they did. He stopped and showed kindness and compassion. This was probably part of a life full of acts of kindness. The Holy Spirit wants each of us to make a habit of being kind.