

Sept 17 – Kindness, Compassion
Ephesians 4:23-32; Galatians 5:22-23

So...how many opportunities did you have this past week to practice patience? Were you more aware of opportunities for patience?

We're taking some time to focus on the Fruit of the Spirit, as described in Galatians 5:22-23. We bear fruit when we are connected with God, with God's love.

In Jeremiah 17:8, we are reminded that when we follow God, we are like a tree planted by the stream, whose roots go deep, ever fresh and bearing fruit, even in drought. Through God, in God, we can bear fruit even in difficult times.

Our tree up in front of the sanctuary is beginning to bear fruit – We have an apple and a nectarine. Why an apple? Why a nectarine? The rug in the Children's Church room shows a piece of fruit with each attribute of the fruit of God's Spirit; last week we talked about patience, the rug shows an apple. For kindness, we see a nectarine (at least that's what I think it is...) When God's Spirit is working in, through, our lives—we are bearing fruit

Patience – Waiting until later to get what we want now
Kindness – Doing something you don't have to do; doing something nice, helpful for another with no thought of payment

Why do we desire to be patient, to be kind? Because this is God's nature. A brief perusal of Bible verses (not exhaustive) reveals that in the Old Testament "kindness" often describes God, not people: "God's loving-kindness." One of those verses we used as our call to worship this morning:

Psalms 63:3-4 "Thy lovingkindness is better than life"
And we are reminded that God wants to reproduce God's nature in us (Ephesians 4:24 The Message)

God's loving-kindness is shown to us through God sending Jesus

God came in human form to show God's love, to teach us and show us how to live

Ephesians 2:7 – "God demonstrated his grace, offering us unmerited favor, in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

Titus 3:4-5 – "When the kindness (loving-kindness) of God our Savior and His love for humans appeared, He saved us according to his mercy through rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" And then the verse in Romans, Romans 2:4, telling us Jesus came as an expression of God's love and reconciliation.

Romans 2:4 – "Do you think you show contempt for the riches of God's kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you toward repentance." Repentance: turning (back) to God and receiving God's love

God's nature is loving-kindness. Jesus also showed God's loving-kindness and compassion toward those he met.

- ◆ Matthew 9:36 – Jesus felt compassion for the people for they were distressed like sheep without a shepherd
- ◆ Matthew 14:14 Jesus healed the sick
- ◆ Matthew 20:34 Jesus restored sight to the blind
- ◆ Mark 9:2-3 When the crowds gathered to listen to Jesus teach and it grew late in the day, Jesus fed them
- ◆ Luke 17:13 Jesus showed compassion for the mother whose only son had just died, restoring the son to life

The very nature of God, of Jesus is loving-kindness, compassion. And God is reproducing accurately God's character in us. That means we are called to show kindness to others

If we human beings practice kindness, what could "kindness" look like in today's world

- ◆ Several years ago, the movie "Pay It Forward" told the story of a boy who received kindness and then began practicing kindness to those he encountered.
- ◆ A couple of years ago, an insurance commercial showed us how one act of kindness inspires another act of kindness, which inspires another act of kindness and so on.

This kindness thing is desperately needed right now, today—the divisions in this country are deep

My daughter, addressing some difficult issues both at work and with her landlord, observes most responses fall into two categories: avoidance (ignoring the problem) or attack. We are lacking the middle ground; we protect ourselves through pretending there is no problem or by attacking others

What if we were to decide to practice kindness?

What CAN kindness look like in today's world?

- ◆ We have seen kindness—much kindness—as Hurricane Harvey and then Hurricane Irma brought destruction: Strangers helping strangers, volunteers working long hours to rescue those in need of evacuation and so many more acts of kindness
- ◆ Recently I overheard someone say, “Wouldn't it be nice if we could be that way all the time?” A wish for kindness

I have some possible responses to why kindness isn't pervasive—isn't everywhere you look

- ◆ We judge worthiness – We believe some people just don't deserve kindness, compassion
- ◆ We worry we'll show kindness and it won't be acknowledged. We ask, “What if the person ignores me?”
- ◆ Maybe we're challenged or questioned; our acts of kindness are met with suspicion: “there must be an ulterior motive” What's the catch? What do you get out of this – what's in it for you?
- ◆ We develop “compassion fatigue” – we feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the need so choose not to act at all.

Yet, in spite of our reservations, our concerns, I'm going to suggest that there is much more kindness than we are aware of: single acts of kindness that get very little attention but convey one person's care for another.

What DOES kindness look like in today's world when there is no destruction or disaster?

- ◆ A policeman issuing a citation but also tying a young man's tie for him so he would be dressed appropriately for an interview 3
- ◆ A grocery store employee helping an elderly woman safely cross the parking lot
- ◆ A restaurant employee helping one of their regular customers eat her lunch, and many more
- ◆ Parents of students at Sandy Hook elementary school, where a disturbed young man shot 20 students and 6 adults, want to spread kindness as a response to their tragedy. Three doctors from the area make regular trips to a remote village in Nicaragua to provide medical treatment. On a recent trip, they took with them letters written by current Sandy Hook students addressed to students in the village. The village students were so excited they decided to write their own letters and have the doctors take them back to Sandy Hook. Kindness connecting students at a site of great tragedy with students far away in Nicaragua. Shared humanity through shared kindness.

Now I'm going to make it difficult for us.

Kindness: if we are followers of Jesus, do we have a choice?

Is it possible for us to say, “I don't have to be kind!”

I'll let you answer that question for yourself.

The answer for me, as one who claims to believe in Christ, the answer is kindness is expected, not optional.

If kindness is expected, how do we practice kindness?

- ◆ There are opportunities – be alert for them
 - Florida evacuees - an elderly couple offered housing to a young family evacuating from Hurricane Irma when they both happened to be at the same gasoline station
 - A musician observed a particular homeless person on the sidewalk. Everyone else seemed to ignore him.

The musician joined the homeless person and began playing. As he played, people left money. The musician made sure all the money went to the homeless man.

- How many of you fly? A recent article about the unusual people challenges airline attendants have to deal with suggested we could each make their day a bit better: greet them, say thank you and please

Opportunities to be kind abound around us. We just need to open our eyes to the possibilities. And if we don't see any opportunities, we can always

- ◆ Make opportunities to be kind
 - One young woman chose to perform 20 acts of kindness for her 20th birthday
 - Two self-described narcissistic New York City residents tried a 12-step experiment to open their eyes, ears and hearts. Four of the twelve steps may sound familiar:
Can I help you? Open your eyes
Kill them with kindness (Romans 12:20, ref. Proverbs 25:21-22)
Pay it forward

What WILL we get out of being kind, out of showing kindness?

- ◆ Knowing someone's situation or that moment in someone's life is just a little better because of your help
Someone like the young man trying to get to an interview, the homeless man on the street, the flight attendant
- ◆ We learn to see the world with new eyes
 - Possibilities as well as problems
Hebrews 13:2 (hospitality to strangers)
"Do not forget, neglect, to extend hospitality to strangers (entertain) for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it.
 - Hope as well as despair
 - Instead of enemies/"the other," we will see our fellow human beings in need of God's love and care"

- We become more like Christ – loving as Christ has loved us Ephesians 4:29-32—"Be kind and compassionate, tenderhearted, to one another forgiving one another just as God in Christ also has forgiven you"
In this verse, "Be kind" is translated from the Greek word *chrestoi*, which sounds like the Greek word *Christos*-Christ. It could be a pun. "Be Christ to one another"
- We will become more like God as God is reproducing accurately God's character is us

We asked why it is that kindness is not pervasive. Let me make one more suggestion. Some of us worry that someone will take advantage of us, of our kindness.

Indeed, someone may take advantage. Mother Teresa, the nun who cared for the Untouchables in India, gave us an answer to our reservation.

"If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives

Be kind anyway

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow

Do good anyway

For you see, in the end it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway."

If we are followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to show God's nature through who we are and what we do. We are to show God's loving-kindness through our kindness to others.

O Lord, thy loving-kindness is better than life

May each of us show kindness throughout this week and throughout our lives and may our acts of kindness inspire kindness in others.