

There is something uplifting about looking for stories of ordinary kindness that gives me hope, especially when most stories leave us feeling frustrated. In the opening monologue from the movie *Love Actually* a character begins with these thoughts, “Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow Airport. General opinion's starting to make out that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don't see that. **It seems to me that love is everywhere.** Often it’s not particularly dignified or newsworthy, but it’s always there – fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends. When the planes hit the Twin Towers, as far as I know, none of the phone calls from the people on board were messages of hate or revenge – they were all messages of love. If you look for it, I’ve got a sneaky feeling you’ll find that love actually is all around.”

In the wake of the most recent rise in covid cases in our area my heart feels heavy, a fourth wave. I found myself wanting to check out – go on vacation again – go back in time to when life was easier, hide in a blanket fort and not come out! But as I ponder when I would go back to there always seems to be something that is hard. While it is true it is not always this hard the weight of making constant decisions about health and safety is exhausting. And what’s more is that I cannot make it better. I

cannot make anyone do anything. At that realization, I could easily say, I give up. But we all know that does make it better either. At that thought I take a deep breath and center myself on what I can do, loving God and knowing that God loves us. And I chuckle because God has a sense of humor right – last week patience & peace. This week Kindness and Goodness. Maybe not humor but a deep understanding of our needs.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the people of Galatia lifts up the fruits of the Spirit as a tonic to those who are living according to the flesh – people who give into selfish delights for only their benefit. Paul, like the prophets before him knew that the human condition going all the way back to just after creation, knew that humanity needed God. None of us get by on our own merit, intelligence or work. We are not independent no matter how hard we may try to be. We are connected and when we forget that, when we give into what we want, it's all too easy to go too far.

Paul in listing the Fruits of the Spirit allows us to see ways in which the grace of God as it is at work in our lives. Paul begins with love which makes room for joy in our lives. Next peace which facilitates patience. Next, kindness and goodness. Being rooted in love allows us to open ourselves up to find ways in which to care for each other. We've all heard the expression practice random acts of kindness. We know that if we are practicing

kindness, it is anything but random, for it is rooted in our love of God and neighbor. So, what is kindness? The *Oxford Dictionary* defines it as “the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate.” *Merriam-Webster*, the quality or state of being gentle and considerate.” It does not seem too hard – in some ways being kind is easier than loving someone. As I searched for examples of kindness I stumbled upon a long list of quotes about kindness, some ancient and some recent. Here are a few that caught my attention.

Aesop, the ancient Greek storyteller, once said, “No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.” Do one small, kind thing each day for someone and pay attention to the impact it has on you.

“Constant kindness can accomplish much. As the sun makes ice melt, kindness causes misunderstanding, mistrust, and hostility to evaporate.” - Albert Schweitzer

“Remember there’s no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end.” – Scott Adams

“Kind words can be short and easy to speak but their echoes are truly endless.” – Mother Teresa

“No kind action ever stops with itself. One kind action leads to another. Good example is followed. A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees. The greatest work that kindness does to others is that it makes them kind themselves.” – Amelia Earhart

“You can accomplish by kindness what you cannot by force.”
– Publilius Syrus

“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.” – Wendy Mass

“Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.” – Desmond Tutu

“When you are kind to others, it not only changes you, it changes the world.” – Harold Kushner

Each of these reminds me that kindness is not about us individually. Kindness is about others and us in community. As we’ve seen when people pay it forward, whether for the meals of others in drive thru lines, or groceries when someone doesn’t have enough, it can have far reaching effects. So why is kindness not our default response? Research has shown that when people are

unkind, hurtful, it comes from feeling bad about themselves and in making another less than themselves boosts their ego.

Almost 30 years ago an adult in my youth program was tired of hearing teenagers put each other down. She decided to institute “The 2 Nice Things Rule” – for every mean thing that was said, 2 nice things were to follow. There was a lot of practice in our time together because we said a lot of mean things to each other. But Mandy was wise beyond her years. In flooding our space with nice things, I cannot remember a mean thing that was said to me in our youth program but do remember always feeling better after youth. And while my experience is a story, research has also shown that:

“The act of being kind releases a range of natural feel-good hormones in your body, including oxytocin and endorphins. Therefore, practicing kindness and compassion can make you happier, boost your immune system, reverse the signs of aging, relieve pain, and even help you live longer. –
BeyondtheShopDoor

Coupling these together we find that our world could be a very different place, because kindness is often contagious. People on the receiving end of acts of kindness often end up spontaneously paying it forward, themselves doing nice things for

other people. Imagine if all of those who identify as Children of God practiced kindness everyday.

As we close our service today we will sing a song that speaks to this truth. We sing our faith, we say “we will work with each other, we will work side by side, we will guard each one’s dignity, they will know we are Christians by our love.” May we not just sing this but live this. May we be kind in all that we say and do so that the love of the one who gives us life is made known. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.