

## **“For God’s Sake Be Kind”**

September 6, 2020

The Epistle Romans 13:8-12

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;

the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

The late Kurt Vonnegut wrote a story about a young man from Pittsburgh who asked, “Please tell me it will all be OK.” “Welcome to earth, young man,” Vonnegut wrote. “It’s hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It’s round and wet and crowded. At the outside, Joe, you’ve got about a hundred years to live here. There’s only one rule that I know of:

(For God’s sake)—Joe, you’ve got to be kind.”

(*A Man without a Country*, p.107, cited by D.J. Hall in *Feasting on the Word*).

Thus, my sermon title.

I was in Meijer last week. Wearing my mask, waiting in the checkout line. A woman came rushing thru the doors without a mask. The man next to me, called out to her really upset “where is your mask? What do you not understand about Covid 19? I guess my safety is not important to you!”

And then he looked over at me. And continued his rage – “I do not understand why people do not wear masks. It is crazy. Does she only care about herself.”

And I shook my head in agreement. (Maybe he was saying what I was thinking) but mostly I remembered the person at a Family Dollar tree who shot someone because they asked them to wear a mask.

I walked back to my car, a little shaken (because he was truly angry) surely there must be a better way to get a message across other than to shame, judge and call names.

“For God’s Sake, be Kind”.

If you watch any social media, you cannot ignore the words and actions of just mean and sometimes just cruel, often toward people of color, women, refugees, immigrants, those who are poor or lost their jobs and even those who do wear a mask. And last week to the US Military – called losers and suckers.

Unfortunately, the church is not immune. Frankly, I am tired of hearing preachers who are an embarrassment to whole church enterprise - spewing out heartlessness and - unkind words.

I do want to be clear, that I am not suggesting not to say anything about injustice, suffering. Just the opposite. We ought to be angry. And should speak out or protest, so, keep doing that. Being kind does not mean apathy.

Just for God’s Sake be kind.

It is what we do, in the midst of this anguish and suffering, to call on our leaders to bring peace and resolution. But I am not sure if that is really going to make a difference. What I do believe this peace we are seeking is not the top down kind of change that we should look for in our politicians.

The peace and the kindness we are seeking requires a systematic change that occurs - from the inside out.

So, I am googling kindness and found The Dali Lama’s Kindness Policy.

He says: “The responsibility does not only lie with the leaders of our countries or with those who have been appointed or elected to do a

particular job. It lies with each of us individually. Peace starts within us. When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us. When our community is in a state of peace, it can share that peace with neighboring communities, and so on.

When we feel love and kindness towards others - it not only makes others feel loved and cared for, but it helps us also to develop our own inner happiness and peace.

The Apostle Paul has his own Kindness policy: “Let love be genuine. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. All of these verses here in chapter 12 form Paul’s Christian Manifesto, his Rome Statement, his kindness policy which—unlike the one that emerged from Wisconsin, Portland and too many other places—is centered on nothing less than God’s unwavering love, a love that enables and empowers all of us. To try and practice these radical, countercultural ways of being in our world every single day.

All of these imperatives, these exhortations, are meant to be our marching orders, offering us “here and now guidance” for how to live a marked life, how to live fully as God’s children in a world whose policies are often starkly different. Be kind. (from a sermon preached by Shannon Kessler)

The Dalai Lama’s Kindness Policy is – “first to cultivate an inner peace. And we can do that by developing love and kindness towards others. And we must take that responsibility to one another seriously. When it happens, even on a small scale in every community throughout the world, an undeniable force of peace is created. How to practice? The Dali Lama suggests:

Step One – Notice. Don’t change anything. Don’t effort. For a week, just notice all the kindness around you.

When a stranger at the grocery store opened the door for another?

What barista honestly asked about your day?

The beautiful promise of fall leaf that got you out of your head for a moment?

Who did you touch? Just notice.

Try putting a few sticky notes in prominent places that say

“Notice Kindness.”

Step Two – Choose. This step has its own magic. Choose kindness and compassion when it might be hard to choose. We are always interacting with others, people, plants, animals, and the so called “inanimate” world.

Notice when the mind is being reactive, irritated, bored or judgmental, and choose to do something kind for another.

Don't think this needs to be elaborate – a kind word or gesture will do.

Lovingly handling a cup of tea- is kindness.

Offering another undivided attention- is kindness.

Take a breath and see what is needed.

What might bring wellbeing to another?

What alleviates suffering?

Be creative. Let go of “shoulds” and the evaluating mind.

Let it come from the heart.

Step Three – Share. Take a moment to share kindness stories. To your neighbors and the community. It is a radical act to share these stories that challenge our media's fixation on our worst human qualities. We can share our stories without being attached to being seen in any way – but instead, share because it's marvelous to participate in life when practicing kindness.

The future is an infinite succession of *presence*. Arrive in kindness.

As Krista Tippett was working her way through Yale Divinity School, her field work was as a chaplain on the Alzheimer's and dementia floor of a community hospital. She found herself confronted with situations that had not formula and text-book answers.

The people she encountered would ask her name. And never remember it.

“They were not interested in my background and education, the places I'd seen, the titles I'd held, the credentials-

They would only know if I was kind, gentle, patient, a good listener. . .

I could [only] come to know them, love them as they were.

It was my greatest gift to them. But they gave me far more.”

And then she says the most surprising thing: she started to experience the presence of God in these simple, mostly silent times of gentle kindness.

She felt God “palpably in the silence.

I could not begin to take away their suffering. But I sat with it, with them.

Sometimes we seemed to summon a palpable joy, a redemptive presence larger than ourselves" (*Speaking of Faith*, pp. 117–118).

Just imagine - If we, could do our best to live into Paul's and the Dali Lama's kindness policies – if we could do our best to follow this kindness policy, could do our best to live in a way that is reflective of the policy of kindness; then we would be a living answer to the unkindest of the world.

We will be people who are acting as church in the best sense of the word; a community who is being Christ's living body in the world;

A protest movement of our own kind built on and sustained by God's strong and resilient love, determined to love this world and all its people into healing—perhaps being purified, made new, ourselves along the way. That would be something, wouldn't it?

For God's Sake – let us be kind.

Amen.