

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from October 17, 2021



Music This I Believe

Music Come, Now is the Time to Worship

Theme And today we worship God, in particular, for his kindness to us. Let's introduce the topic with a couple stories. The first I told you a long time ago (but if I hadn't told you that, you probably wouldn't remember, right 😊?)

Once upon a time, in the middle of a forest stood the tallest tree. It was grumpy tree. It refused to let anyone cool in its shade or hide in its shadow. It would use its limbs and roots to shoo away anyone who tried. One extra cold, windy year, the tree, leafless at this time of the season, was near freezing to death.

Now a little girl spent each winter with her grandma near that forest; and while on a walk she discovered the shivering tree. She went to get a great big scarf to warm it up. People and animals both told her about how mean and selfish that tree was and warned her to not help it. But the girl said, "Just because the tree isn't good and nice, that doesn't mean I should not be kind. She put the scarf on the tree anyway.

Thanks to the girl's kindness, the tree survived the hard winter. Not only that, it learned something from the girl's generosity. On the day she was going to head back home for the summer, she took a walk into the forest. It was a miserably hot day and sat down under the grumpy tree. Everyone who saw this held their breath. But the old, grumpy tree not only allowed it, it bent around her to provide some really nice cool shade. Word spread all through the forest of the great tree's transformation and how it would kindly shade all the forest creatures who needed a break from the sun's heat, and the forest world became a much better place in which to live.

A businessman had another theory on how to make the world a better place to live. He knew what he was talking about because he claimed to make the best blueberry ice cream in the country. A magazine survey confirmed this claim. He did it by making the very best cream, picking only the best of the best blueberry crops in the world. His company lived by the philosophy of "Zero defects! Total Quality Management! Continuous improvement!"

He felt that by this philosophy, he could vastly improve the public education system by teaching them this philosophy. He perfected his lecture as he was

preparing to go on tour, which he later admitted was perfectly balanced between arrogance and ignorance. He discovered this during the question/answer period after his speech, when a teacher stood up and asked. “What do you do if you get a bad batch of blueberries?”

“We reject them and send them back.” The teacher said, “We cannot ever send back our “blueberries”. We take them big, and small, and rich, and poor, and gifted, exceptional, and abused, and frightened, and confident, and homeless, and rude, and brilliant. We take them with ADD and ADHD, with junior rheumatoid arthritis, and English as their second language. We take them *all*. Every one. [and work with kindness to make each one of them have an opportunity to maximize their own potential].”

These are two theories of how to make the world a better place. One is to be like the tree and to be grumpy and mean to everyone we think is different (and of course, we are all different, right?) so they will go away and stay away and we don’t have to deal with them. The other is to be kind to others even if we do not agree with them or what they do to us. Which way do you think Jesus prefers?

Responsive Reading (LR: Lay Reader, **C: Congregation**)

Pastor: Maybe our Bible based Scripture reading will help answer that question.

LR: We used to be stupid, disobedient, and foolish, as well as slaves of all sorts of desires and pleasures. We were evil and jealous. Everyone hated us, and we hated everyone.

C: God our Savior showed us how good and *kind* he is by coming to save *all* people.

LR: He gave himself to rescue us from everything that is evil and to make our hearts pure. Jesus treated us much better than we deserve. He saved us because of his mercy, and not because of any good things that we have done.

C: He gave us new birth and a fresh beginning.

LR: He taught us to give up our wicked ways and our worldly desires and to live decent and honest lives in this world. He wanted us to be his own people and to be eager to do right. He made us acceptable to God and gave us the hope of eternal life.

C: We are filled with hope, as we wait for the glorious return of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

LR: God sent Jesus Christ our Savior to give us his Spirit.

C: God washed us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

LR: Live your whole life in the Spirit and you will not satisfy the desires of your lower nature... If our lives are centered in the Spirit, let us be guided by the Spirit.

C: The Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...

(Intermix of Titus 2:11-14, 3:3-7 (CEV),
and quoting Galatians 5:16, 25 (PHILLIPS), 22 (NCV)

Do you know how some Bibles have topical headings over different sections of Scripture? One of the Bibles I was using as a reference for this responsive reading had the heading: "God's Kindness and the New Life" -- or to put it another way -- God's kind unending love and grace removes what ties us down and gives us a new lease on life... Sing with us...

Music Amazing Grace, My Chains are Gone**Prayers**

And forever his, in his hands, in his time, we recognize how much we need him in our daily life -- he is the air and nourishment we need. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing.

Prayer Music Breathe

Pastor's Let's pray. Lord, we were all lost at one time or another, but you came and sought us out and found us. And now that our eyes are open to your presence, our hearts are full of praise for all the wonderful things you have done, do, and will continue to do as you create, recreate, and rule with kindness and justice. You prosper and sustain us so that we can serve you in your kingdom now and through eternity. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. We recognize that we are all different -- forgive us when we focus on that as a detriment rather than a blessing. Help us to follow your example, we are very different from you, but you accept and love us anyway, so show us too, how to love and accept others so that our world will be a better place... **Intercession** With that in mind, we pray for these requests that have come in: Terri Priess's cousin and Beckie Wren's daughter Jennifer Bonneville. Her family has covid. Jennifer doing better, but husband Warren is high risk and in the hospital with breathing trouble, and the children have pneumonia. We lift them up today.

* Michael Shinkle is relatively new among us. When feeling well enough to come he usually sits near the back on the sound booth side. He has requested prayers for son Ted and daughter-in-law Dawn, she is recovering from breast cancer

surgery, and Jan Martin requests prayers for the family of Nancy Schultz, who died on October 12th. **Quilts** And then today, we also pray for Makyla, a 15 year old who had cancer as a young child, is now facing a biopsy, and for Mike Norman – with covid, in a hospital on a ventilator and dialysis; and for these two we dedicate these two quilts.

God of love and comfort, we are grateful for the quilting ministry of Hartland United Methodist Church, for it gives us an opportunity – out of love and concern for others - to share a tangible gift with those facing challenging times. We know that you are always present in our lives and that your love transcends all tragedy, illness and pain, but we also know that you can use a physical reminder, such as these quilts, to bring hope, healing and peace. We pray that these quilts will do this for Makyla and Mike.

In the midst of their unique challenges, may they trust in your goodness and be confident in your faithfulness, keep them steady and calm in patience. Remove doubts and fears from their hearts, knowing that you are with them every moment of every day. And we ask that these quilts, made with loving hands, serve to comfort them, warm them, and remind them that no matter the journey, they are held in the care and prayers of this congregation, and in your loving arms, heavenly Father. We pray this in the name of the One who taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

And the reason Jesus taught us to pray to our Heavenly Father is because he is good and perfect in every way for he is *for* us

Music Good, Good Father

Bible Reading Introduction

That song certainly implies that our “Good Heavenly Father” is kind as he tenderly tells us he loves us and is pleased with us and that we are never alone. Likewise, in today’s reading, Paul doesn’t use the word kindness, but it is implied throughout the words, which do happen to include the first four character traits of the Spirit’s fruit that we have talked about in this series -- listen for love, joy, patience, and peace as Paul describes how to live kindly.

Bible Reading Romans 12:9-21

Love must be sincere. Hate everything that is evil and cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love as brothers and sisters and honor others more than yourselves. Never give up. Eagerly follow the Holy Spirit and serve the Lord. Let your hope make you joyful. Be patient in time of trouble and faithful in prayer. Take

care of the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Welcome strangers into your home. Ask God to bless and not to curse everyone who mistreats you. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with everyone. Don't be proud and feel you are [better] than others. Do not be conceited. Make friends with ordinary people. Don't mistreat someone who has mistreated you. But try to earn the respect of others, [by being] careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, do your best to live at peace with everyone. Dear friends, Do not take revenge, don't try to get even, but leave room for God's wrath, for in the Scriptures it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. The Scriptures also say, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Don't let evil defeat you, but overcome evil with good. (CEV and NIV blended)

Sermon Releasing the Power of Kindness

A commercial advertised a television program years ago. They take a bunch of people and put them in a house to live together for several months to quote "find out what happens when people stop being polite and start getting real." unquote [*The Real World*.]

When did "real" become equal to "nasty"?

According to Wikipedia, "the series was first hailed for depicting issues of contemporary young-adulthood..." (I suspect none of those contemporary issues were framed in the form of the fruit of the Spirit: How do I develop a deep loving relationship? How do I effectively experience and share true joy?" "How do I effectively channel my anger and create peace? How can I exhibit more patience? or today's, how can I be kind to those who are not kind to me? Topics that are always relevant – hot topics for all of us... But I suspect they are more along the lines of "My life is a dramatic mess; so I'm going to make yours even worse." And sure enough, the article goes on to say that over time, the show "garnered a reputation as a showcase for immaturity and irresponsible behavior of the declining morals..."

In some (seemingly growing) circles, there appears to be an admiration for those who meanly, even crassly get in your face – correction -- I should say it this way—get in the face of others with whom we also don't agree... (no one wants it in their own face).

Some Christians, too, I've heard, want to "keep it real" as well – some quoting the phrase like it is a banner of their faith. It is a vague phrase which can mean almost anything from "our faith needs to be as genuine, sincere, consistent, and non-pretend as we can possibly be" – with which I totally agree; but in the context it was usually stated, it leans more closely to the television show ideal of unlovingly pointing out everyone else's shortcomings. This *over-focus* on finding and picking on the negative caused Morton Kelsey to write that it is difficult for many modern people to believe in -- [a Good, Good Father who is perfect in every way, or in] -- the positive, healing ministry of Jesus and of Christian care because they find it hard to believe in a loving God who can or who wishes to heal" (because they have heard so much of the opposite). And this caused Francis McNutt to answer those skeptics who view God as inhumanely vindictive by saying, "We would put a father in jail who said to a disobedient child: 'Since you have been naughty, I will give you a little disease or crisis or tragedy.' Yet that is how many people think God treats his people, or people in general", and apparently that he doesn't even worry about the collateral damage – all the "innocents" that get caught up in "all that punishing he is so eager to do."

Regardless of this fascination with our increasingly "real" aggressive culture, when it comes right down to it, we all want to receive kind, fair, respectful treatment, right? And if that is what we want to get, isn't that what we should want to give? So today we look at another characteristic of God, another aspect of the Spirit's fruit, which is usually translated as gentleness or kindness. We'll use the latter word. It means to have truly warm, affectionate feelings – a compassion that moves us to act in loyal support of each other.

After everything I just said, the line that leaps out as a big question mark from our Bible

Motivation for Kindness (MfK):

reading is that if you give food and drink to your hungry, thirsty enemy, you will be heap burning coals of his head. It sounds like the motivation for kindness is getting revenge. (Rubbing hands together in villainous glee) "Oh boy, if I am nice to you, the God is going to get you and I'm going to love that!" Where is the kindness in that? Surely, that can't be a proper motivation, can it?

It isn't. The idea is that genuine expressions of kindness and gentle correction can, like our grumpy tree and businessman from the Theme stories, cause our conscience to burn within us, urging us to reconsider our behaviors and start a new, better track in life... It is not about getting back at someone. It is about

modeling a higher road of life that *maybe* they can choose to journey along with us as well. It is about redemption and transformation and sincerely hoping for something better for the other person; accomplished by giving sincere gestures that hope to turn that unkind person into a friend. And that is our first motivation for being kind.

MfK - Transformation
MfK - Political Practical

Our second motivation is that there is a political-practical side to being kind. 1 Kings 12 gives us an example: King David's son, Solomon reigned as king for 40 years. We may know of his reputation for being wise, for being wealthy, and for the great expansion of building programs under his reign. What we don't always hear is that to accomplish all of that, there also came heavy taxes and harsh labor. So harsh that one of Solomon's officials, Jeroboam, led a revolt. He lost and fled to Egypt. Time passes and Solomon is succeeded by his son Rehoboam. That is when Jeroboam, the revolter, sent a delegation to Solomon's son Rehoboam, saying, "Your father Solomon put a heavy yoke (burden) on us, but if you lighten the load, we will gladly serve you."

Rehoboam consulted his advisors. They said, "If you will be kind to these people... they will always be your servant."

Rehoboam then asked his peers what they thought. They said; "Tell them 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist'." Meaning, "that if you thought Solomon laid a heavy burden on you, just wait till I start my policies. Rehoboam chose to be bully-ish in his policies rather than find peace through cooperation and good will.

As a result, Jeroboam and Israel said, what do we have to do with the house of David (with the current nation), and the kingdom became two kingdoms, both weakened from what they could have been together. And at least in part because at a critical juncture, a key figure promised to *not* be kind. If people are not treated with respect and kindness, they still "pick up their marbles and go home" don't they. and maybe even worse than that -- and in the long run, it may come back to haunt the unkind person.

Another motivation for kindness is because we are called to be different. Paul's leadership had come under criticism in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 6, he defends his style by saying "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited..." He lists some of his sacrifices they did to make that happen, and

MfK: Called to be Different

then adds that he modeled “hard work, purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love.” Paul lists kindness as one of the marks that distinguishes Christian living and leadership from the world's way of living and leading.

But Bible passage after passage, the real motivation to be kind is to pass on the kindness God has shown to us.

MfK: God is kind to us

Nehemiah 9:17ff: Governor Nehemiah in the Old Testament includes just one example in his critical speech to the nation returning from exile and he tried to motivate them. He said, “Our ancestors were arrogant and stiff-necked and did not obey God. They refused to listen and failed to remember God’s miracles performed among them. In their rebellion, they even appointed a leader to return them to their slavery. [Can you imagine?] But God is a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love. Therefore, even in their defiant nature, God refused to desert them.” He is saying, God is not going to desert you no matter what as you undertake this daunting task of returning from exile and rebuilding the homeland.

Lest we think we have gotten better than that over the centuries than those stubborn Old Testament people, Paul tells Titus (and we heard some of this in the responsive reading) that at one time, we too were disobedient, ... living in malice (that is a seething anger that wants to get back at people) and in envy (angry at someone because we think they have something that we think we want to have but don't), we were motivated by hate and being hated in return. [Despite this] the kindness and love of God our Savior ... saved us because of his merciful kindness. (Titus 3:3ff)

Children get it. They say that most children, when asked to draw Jesus, will draw Him with a smile on His face. Even on the cross, 1/2 of children will draw Him with a smile on His face. They understood that passage in Hebrews 12 that says for the *joy* set before Him, he endured the cross, and scorned its shame. (Hebrews 12:2)

Schia was 4 when her baby brother was born. She wanted to be alone with the baby. The parents were a bit worried about that, but after some time they decided to allow it. Schia closed the door, but the parents cracked it back open so they could watch and listen carefully. Schia walked quietly up to her baby brother, put her face close to his, and say, "Baby, tell me what God is like, I'm starting to forget."

As we grow older, as more time passes since we first came to know the Father through Christ, do we begin to forget? Do we forget how much love and grace he

has shown to us? Do we need to get back to that childhood view of a -- *kind* -- God?

And then practice kindness with others just as He has for us. Not just with those “good

How to Release Kindness (HtRK)

blueberries”, the acceptable ones who are loving and kind to us -- but to all people. Matthew 5:43-48 addresses that, I’ll let you read that on your own. Here are some tips on how to release kindness in our life, then. It doesn’t work in every situation, but there are different strategies for different times.

First, if you at all can, ignore divisiveness. Several years ago, I made a comment on a friend’s

HtRK: Ignore Divisiveness

Facebook page, and one of his friends, a stranger to me, decided to take issue with what I had said. That was fine, people have a right to disagree and have a different opinion. But it was one of those responses that if veiled at all, clearly implied at the very outset: “How stupid can you be?” ... And concluded with a question designed to pull me into a conversation in which I would have to agree with him completely or brace myself for an escalation of insults. Of course, I didn’t reply, I dropped the conversation and went on with my life. I did notice that twice more he re-asked the question, trying to bait me or anyone reading it to answer the question so he could continue his ranting. No one responded to him. The division ended because it takes two to argue. I noticed later that my friend had to unfriend him because he was causing so many problems with so many of his other Facebook friends.

Paul advised young Titus (Titus 3:10-11) to avoid foolish controversies and arguments and quarrels because they are unprofitable and useless. This does not mean we cannot disagree, it means we have a loyal, respectful lovingkindness for each other; and we do not put our disagreements over our relationships. It means we don't make mountains out of molehills, which is the common tendency for many of us to do; but we use our faith to make mountains move until they are reduced to molehills. (“Flaws become quirks”)

One way to help move mountains is to determine within ourselves to be a builder and not a demolition expert.

HtRK Be a Builder and not a destroyer

Paul tells the Ephesians to get rid of all [the destructive traits of] bitterness, and rage and anger, and brawling and slander, and malice, and to not engage in unwholesome talk (tearing others down), but only say what is helpful for building up others according to *their* needs, for their benefit... incorporating kindness and compassion to one another, forgiving each other just

as in Christ God forgave you. (See Ephesians 4:29-32). And again from today's bible reading which is practical and mostly self-explanatory -- we only need read it and take it seriously. I will simply highlight from it that kindness (1) shares (2) empathizes (3) leaves revenge to God, and (4) overcomes evil with good.

Some of you may ask, but for how long? How long do we have to put up with people who treat us badly? Well, we can

HtRK: Be an Overcomer
HtRK: Ignore the idea of Limitations

always figure out a way to not deal with them, I suppose; but if we have to deal with them -- the disciples asked that question, How often must I forgive? 7 times? (The religious standard of the day was 3, by the way) But Jesus' answer (which may have been 77, or 70x7) implies that it is not even the right question to ask. (Matthew 18:21-23, Luke 17:3-5) If we are doing math and counting failures, we are already on the wrong track. (See 1 Corinthians 13:5c – “love keeps no records of wrongs”) Biblical kindness doesn't consider limitations. The Holy Spirit can empower us to be kind – we still have to take our steps and stands – but we can still be kind in the face of all kinds of pressures.

A children's song encourages us to:

Let your kindness show,
 let your kindness grow
 A little seed is all you need, you know. *

and the presence of the Holy Spirit puts that seed within us, and with our cooperation, he cultivates it until our kindness begins to blossom. One of the daily exercises of a discipleship program was to prayerfully dream up and execute a random kind act for someone that day. I can tell you, at first it is a struggle, trying to prayerfully imagine who, and what, and then to take action and do that each day. But after a while it became one of the highlights of the day – creating and planning, and surprising someone with a good deed.

God makes it is clear how much he did that for us, he loved us, while we were still sinners. He used his divine strength to surrender everything in order to come, live, and die at our hands. Talk about a “random” good deed! Many see kindness and gentleness as weak and wimpy these days. Few things are more out of sync with our culture and more challenging for us than to not be run over by people, but at the same time retaining our kindness in the face of intolerance that is directed at us.

The Holy Spirit reminds us what Christ has done for us on the cross, and encourages us to have that same attitude toward others. It takes a determined willingness to say, “not my will, but thy will be done”, and that takes a desperate

desire to be found, and nourished and taught by Christ (as our prayer chorus said). The secret -- is not to work at it harder at it in ourselves, as much as it is to let God work in us more and more so that it is he and his traits that are flowing through us.

That children's song goes on to say:

Kindness is that little bit of love you share,
 When you understand, or lend a hand,
 its showing that you care,
 Kindness is the very little things you do,
 when you want to say, in a special way.
 God and I love you. *

Prayer Let's pray. Lord, we love you because you first loved us, even when we wander away from you, you draw us back by your never-failing kindness. You receive us, lavish your love on us so that we have the right be called your children. We give our thanks with deep gratitude for all the kind things you have done and are doing and will do for your creation and your people, and even for people who are not your people – yet. We pray that Jesus' life and teaching may be our example for intentionally sharing our talents, our prayers, our time, our witness and our offerings. We humbly offer ourselves as an expression of our faith. We pray that as we take the time to draw closer to you and allow you to reign in us, we receive from you your comfort, your never tiring strength and defense as you lift us up to perform actions of kindness and compassion for others, that your kingdom will advance and you, the everlasting God, will be honored to the ends of the earth. In Jesus Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Music Everlasting God

Blessing Now go blessed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Go with strength and courage to bear the fruit [of kind, genuine love, holding fast to the good and rejoicing in hope] so that our lives will be instrumental in transforming and renewing the earth. Amen.

* From Agapeland Character Builders, Ep 10: The Trouble with Tuffy (Kindness), Bridgestone Multimedia Group 1985 Garden Valley Music/Ascaph

