**Luke 6:27-36** February 24, 2019

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Epiphany 7

*Luke 6:27[Jesus said,] “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. 30Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

 *32“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. 33And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. 34And 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. 35But 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. 36Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”*

**The No.1 Reason to “Just Be Kind”**

Dear Friends in Christ,

 I don’t know if it happens to you, but it happens to me maybe once a week or so. I am driving the car and I happen to notice one of those signs that you see in front of a lot of homes these days: “Just be kind.” I see those all the time, but about once a week or so that sign makes me think. It makes me think about the news that I heard on the radio, or the tragic life stories I heard from people, and I think, “That is so true. If there had just been a little bit of kindness in there somewhere in that story, it could have ended so much differently. Feelings would have been saved. Some people’s lives so much less sad. Maybe even lives saved. If someone, anyone, would have shown just a little bit of kindness instead of selfishness, instead of proving that ‘I am right,’ instead of insisting on ‘my way or the highway.’” The sign is a good reminder.

 A little history here about “Just Be Kind.” About four years ago it started as an after-school club in suburban Indianapolis. Over the following summer break the teen-age kids started to paint those signs you see in so many lawns, they sold the signs for a profit and then plowed that profit into local charities. It worked wonders, and others started to copycat.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 First thing I want to say about the “Just Be Kind” phenomenon is that it is a good thing for our world. Anything that you hear in this sermon that might sound like a criticism, I would ask you to think of as a clarification. “Just Be Kind” is a good thing, but by itself it is not a spiritual thing. Anyone can agree to “Just Be Kind.” You can be a Christian, or of another faith, or of no faith at all and still agree that just being kind is a good thing. I’m not being critical. I am being clear.

 So here is a question, and it is a very important question: If someone asked you, why should I “Just Be Kind”? How would you answer that?

**Being Kind and Being Merciful**

 Some might look at our Gospel reading today and think, “Just Be Kind” sounds very much lot like what Jesus said in Luke 6. But one difference is that Jesus’ message is not a lawn sign or a church marquee scolding the passing public. Jesus’ message is a message delivered within a church. Not that it was in a church building, but it was spoken to his to his people, his closest followers. Verse 20, a little bit before our reading, says that Jesus called his disciples to him for this lesson. This lesson wasn’t for everyone. It is a reminder that in God’s eyes, the only people who can act like Christians are Christians. Others can act like Christians to human eyes, but their hearts are not right, and it is the heart that matters. (It is to our shame that sometimes those whose hearts are not right act better than we Christians do, but that is a discussion for another time.)

 Truth be told, Jesus’ teaching leaves “Just Be Kind” in the dust. Again, not a criticism, just an observation. What Jesus calls us to is something beyond simply being kind. As he puts it, ***“Be merciful.”***

 Kindness is a softness of touch. It is a concern for the feelings. Those are good things, godly things. But mercy is greater because mercy means kindness to a person does not deserve it. Mercy, by definition, says that the other person is a unworthy, guilty, even rotten person!

 This is the point that Jesus makes in verses 28-30 of our reading. ***“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak [coat], do not stop him from taking your tunic [shirt]. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.”***

 Jesus does not tell his followers to just be kind to the impoverished family down the street, to help out someone who is trying but just can’t get ahead. Jesus is talking about how we relate to people who have been nasty to us. They have proven that they have no regard for us. Jesus says, “Love them. Ask God to bless them. Pray for them. Do not retaliate. Be generous with them.”

 That’s more than just being kind, that’s merciful!

 In that list of commands, the first thing Jesus says is ***“Love your enemies.”*** In the Bible, there are two different Greek words that get translated “love.” One of the words, not the one here, means that you “love” something because you like it: like your favorite flavor of ice cream, your dog, even your friends. You “love” them because they are pleasing to you. Emotionally you like them. Nothing wrong with this.

 The other word translated “love”, the one used here, is different. It is not an emotional response, but it’s a response of our will. It’s a choice. Perhaps, because the word “love” has been so devalued in our time, maybe it would be better to think “loving concern.” This kind of love chooses to be concerned even when we might not like the person or situation.

 So we may have an enemy whom we find it impossible, for the moment, to like. Nonetheless Jesus tells us to love them, that is, be concerned about them. So much so that even when they curse us, we bless them; when they mistreat us, we pray for them; when they strike us, we don’t retaliate. Emotionally we may not want to, but we choose to.

 How far this love for enemies should go, we will see in the coming weeks of Lent. At every step of Jesus’ way from the Garden of Gethsemane to the cross, Jesus responded with love toward his enemies. Jesus chose to respond with concern when he healed the severed ear of one of those who came to arrest him, when he gave a last invitation to repent to his betrayer, when he testified to the truth before Pilate, when he prayed to God the Father to forgive those pounding the nails into his flesh, when he promised heaven to one who had been mocking him but then thought better of it. All of it suffered for sinners. Every step of the way, Jesus lived out these words. Jesus loved his enemies, and not just when times were good.

 Oh, how much I have to learn! What Jesus tells me to do I have so often not done! I have felt resentment when I was wronged. I have at times not wished my troublers well.

**The Reasons**

 How can we learn to be merciful in all circumstances? What explanation can give me sufficient reason to just be kind?”

 Maybe I should be kind because when I am kind, then other people will be kind. We parents may have said to our children. “When you are nice, people will be nice to you.” But is that a good enough reason—to be kind because that will make my life easier?

 Let me give you an example. Some years ago when we lived in the African country of Zambia, the lady who cleaned our house asked my wife for time off to go to a funeral. So Lisa asked, “Is the deceased your family? No. A friend? No.” After a few questions we foreigners were inclined to not let her have the time off, at least not with pay. “Then why do you need to go to this funeral?” “Because, Madame, if I don’t go to this funeral, then when I have a funeral at my house, no one will come to help me!” How selfish, right! But how often is that precisely the same motivation we have? I will be nice now and then they will have to be nice to me down the line! Jesus said, ***“If you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that.”***

 Another reason is the same thing, but on the other side: to not be unkind because if everyone started being unkind, then what kind of world would we have? Someone once said, “An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind,” (which is a misunderstanding of the Bible passage—but that is for another time.) But is that a good enough reason to “love your enemy”? Should you be kind because if you aren’t kind this world will be an unlivable place? Again, ***“what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that.”***

 But Jesus gives us a sufficient reason to be kind, or even better, to be merciful. What does Jesus say our number one reason is for being kind and merciful? How can you be kind to people who make your life difficult, who make you afraid to get out of bed in the morning, who make rude or belittling comments when they see you? To them you can’t just be kind. You must be merciful. But how? Jesus tells us the number one reason to be kind and merciful, the only sufficient reason we have to be merciful is this: ***“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”***

 When we ask ourselves, “Why should I do this?” we look just about always look at the outcome. We cast our mind down the road a few days, months or years and weigh the outcome with the investment.

 Why do we go to school? So we can get an education and hopefully down the road make a decent living. Why do we save up hard earned money now? So we can retire, and hopefully at least not in poverty. Why do we eat healthily and exercise? So we can stay healthier. Or why don’t we do some of these things? Because we don’t think that, in the end, the payoff is worth the bother. Why do we vote for certain politicians? Because they hope they will do something for us and/or our nation. The motivation for almost everything we do, is what we hope to get out at the end.

 Jesus tells us to completely reverse our thinking. When it comes to being kind and merciful to our enemies, don’t do it because of anything you get out of it. No. As long as you look at that end of the equation you will never have a sufficient reason to be kind and merciful. You are being kind and merciful to frail sinful people who will disappoint you, who might even take advantage of you, who might even remain lifelong enemies! And if *that* is the reason you are kind and merciful, you will one day become an embittered person who has tallied an entire spreadsheet full of people who have done you wrong.

 Stop looking at the outcome. Jesus says, look at the source. ***“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”*** Forget about what people might or might not do. Remember what your heavenly Father has done for you. How mercifully you have been forgiven your sins: your childhood disrespect of parents, the sinful passions of youth, the impatience toward other people, the times you have wished evil on your enemies rather than praying for them, the times you returned curse for curse rather than blessing. Oh, how kind and merciful our God has been toward us, forgiving us all in Christ.

 What a difference that makes! Because you know what I hear—and maybe this is just me—but you know what I hear in my mind every time I see one of those signs in a person’s yard? No matter how much I think our word needs more kindness, I still hear, “Better Just Be Kind… or Else” in a scolding voice. Jesus could not leave it “Just Be kind.” That wasn’t enough. Instead, with an encouraging heavenward look of the eyes he says, “Be kind, just as your Heavenly Father is kind.” Amen.

1. https://fox59.com/2018/08/08/just-be-kind-movement-spreading-worldwide/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)