

Devotions – March 8-14, 2020

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Sunday, March 8, 2020

This week in March I have chosen to reflect on KINDNESS as we at Immanuel, Escanaba are focusing on this theme throughout the Lenten season.

Can we imagine our world, country, communities, schools, workplaces, and our homes as places of KINDNESS, where KINDNESS is overflowing? Can we imagine KINDNESS is everywhere where everyone is cared for and valued? Can we imagine the hateful rhetoric and the polarized factions in our public discourse forever going away? You may think “Impossible” but, our faith says, “Possible” because our God says, “It’s never too late.” Thank you, God! But before KINDNESS can be a global movement, it must first become personal.



So... these reflections this week will take on a KINDNESS demeanor for us to practice. I hope you will choose to wear KINDNESS this week.

Text: Genesis 9:13-15

“The rainbow I have placed in the sky is my sign to you and every living creature on the earth... When you see the rainbow in the sky remember my promise that I have made with you.”

It is nearly impossible to count all the ways kindness is demonstrated in the Bible. It is a constant theme throughout the Bible, first introduced in Genesis and found to the very end of Revelation. The rainbow is a symbol for God’s kindness for the world. It represents a choice God made for God’s people from the beginnings of creation. Therefore, kindness can be seen as an act of God’s all-embracing love of all creation.

The story of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37 is another example of kindness being demonstrated. The Samaritan demonstrated kindness of attention; he noticed the hurt man and stopped.

The kindness of tolerance... he ignored cultural boundaries.

The kindness of equality... he stooped down to the man’s level.

The kindness of compassion... he empathized.

The kindness of contact... he tended to the man’s wounds.

The kindness of action... he took the man to an inn to heal.

The kindness of generosity... he paid for the man to be cared for.

In what ways have you chosen to show kindness? How might you choose to be kind today? Have you been quick to judge or impatient or insensitive? How does experiencing God’s kindness help you to share kindness?

Kindness is a choice we choose each day to exhibit.

Let us Pray: Lord God, help me to be kind today. Help me to recognize when I haven't been kind. Help me to be intentional today and to practice being kind to the people I encounter. Amen



Monday, March 9, 2020

Text: Matthew 21:12-17

“Jesus went into the temple and chased out the moneychangers...”

Jesus commands us to be kind. But he never once talked about being nice. There are times and places where Jesus didn't practice niceness. The above passage is one of those times. He kind of got angry with all the commerce going on in God's house, the church. I've often been conflicted when we in the church do fundraisers to raise money for this and that - many times to raise money for our youth to go to camp, or gathering, or any one of a dozen other things we don't want to directly fund. The attitude has often been that the kids should work for the things they want to do. I don't think this is very kind or nice.

Jesus seems to point out there is a difference between being nice and being kind. Jesus wasn't nice with the people at the temple that day and I believe Jesus isn't nice with us sometimes when we behave badly. But that doesn't mean Jesus doesn't love us nor does it impact the kindness of Jesus towards us.

Unlike niceness, which focuses on outward consequences, kindness comes from an inner desire to show love and concern for no personal gain. In other words, kindness always has an eye towards the greater good. I heard a person telling a story of how they gave a slice of bread to a person who was hungry and thought that was nice. The person listening to the story then said, “Putting jam on the bread would have been loving kindness.” You can be nice and not care, but you can't be kind without caring. So... how might you be kind today rather than just nice?

Let us Pray: God, help us to become more than nice today. May we not be tempted to settle for niceness; instead empower us to be people of kindness. Amen



Tuesday, March 10, 2020

Text: Galatians 5:22-23

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

I don't know about you, but I am continually challenged by this passage to live out the fruit of the Spirit. It seems my prerogative is the opposite. Just when I think I'm making progress in living in the Spirit, I succumb to my guilty temptations. I often wish...sometimes sheepishly... that the fruit of my spirit was far more mature and riper.

As we give the Spirit more control over our lives, God begins to shape us and grow us to look more like Jesus. When the Spirit lives in us our lives our fruit grows and ripens as we mature. Just like real fruit grows and ripens, we too grow, mature, and ripen in maturity of Christ. But we must constantly be working to make sure the plant of our lives is nurtured and cared for.

We must be like gardeners in order for the fruit of kindness to be developed in our lives. Sometimes we might need to prune our branches to improve our fruit and its yields. We must do the human part of keeping the garden weed-free and trust God will do God's part of providing the growing power to deepen the virtues of the Spirit. How might you practice the fruit of the Spirit today? In what ways could you develop a nurturing lifestyle to grow in the virtues of the Spirit? Today I will practice kindness by doing....?

Let us Pray: God, empower me to speak more kindly, think more kindly, and act more kindly today. May I be open to growing in the fruit of the Spirit each day. Amen



Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Text: Romans 12:15-16

“Be happy with those who are happy, and when they are sad, be sad. Be friendly with everyone. Don't be proud and feel that you are smarter than others. Make friends with ordinary people.”

In the era of social media and technology in general, kindness can be hard to come by. The rhetoric of anti-this and anti-that clog up both the airwaves and airways. It's loud and unrelenting, life-draining and often quite unkind. Taking the higher ground is often difficult in the fast-paced era of instant gratification.

So... how do you determine when the “Higher Ground” is necessary in your life? How do you practice kindness when challenged with a moral decision? When you choose kindness, do you see past your own needs or do you open your heart to seeing and hearing the person in front of you? Can you see past the annoying behavior of a person and go to where they are hurting most?

The Apostle Paul says, “Be happy with those who are happy, be sad with those who are sad.” This can be difficult at times, but when we choose kindness God opens a door to be...to be with the other...to be present in the midst of being happy or sad.

Let us Pray: *Lord God, help me to choose kindness today. Help me to be happy when happiness is warranted and to be sad when I need to hold up those who are sad. Help me to be compassionate and to always take the higher ground. Amen*



Thursday, March 12, 2020

Text: Matthew 5:16

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

In 1982, author Anne Herbert scrawled the phrase “Practice random acts of kindness” on a restaurant place mat and two years later “Random Acts of Kindness Day” was instituted in Denver, Colorado. Today it is celebrated annually on February 17 as an awareness to be kind to those we encounter in our daily lives.

Jesus gives us a glimpse as to how this takes place in our lives with the passage above. Shine before others and people will know how you live your life. It begins with how and if you are loving God. If your life reflects that of loving God, then you will love people. In other words, loving God opens us to being light to the world. It means we live love in action. How are you living your love of God in action?

I recently heard a story of a person giving a slice of bread to someone who was hungry. The other person sort of objected to the person giving to the person in need. The response was... I gave the bread as an act of kindness... but I should have put jam on it then it would have been an act of loving kindness. How often do we just do what might be required? Do just enough kindness to get credit? Why not act with loving kindness and go beyond the need? We all make choices to act in kindness. I challenge you to go beyond just being kind... demonstrate loving kindness.

Let us Pray: *Lord, help me to be more than I am. Encourage me be a person of loving kindness to those I encounter today. Amen*



Friday, March 13, 2020

Text: Matthew 21:8-11

“... Hosanna to the Son of David... Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord... Hosanna in the highest!”

This may be familiar to many. It is when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey as people place cloaks and palm branches on the path as an act of worship. Jesus enters into the city as a triumphant king... at least in the minds of those gathered. At the end of the week, it is a different story than the one they thought was going to take place.

The word that comes to mind for me is “Sacrifice” in this story. Unbeknownst to the crowd, Jesus is laying the groundwork for sacrifice. The people are cheering with joy...they are worshipping...they are hoping that now Jesus will take up his kingship and throw out the Romans.

Well, we know how the story turns out. The Apostle Paul in Roman 12:1 encourages, “I beg you to offer your bodies to him (Jesus) as a living sacrifice.” This is what Jesus did for us, and we are asked to do the same for him... Jesus. Today when people look at sacrifice, I wonder what comes to mind? In Jesus’ day, the people sacrificed an animal to God for the forgiveness of their sins as an act of worship. How do we offer a sacrifice as an act of worship? Is worship just a feeling, or a practice, or just something we do?

From God’s perspective, everything we do is an act of worship. In Matthew 25:35-40, Jesus describes:

When I was hungry you gave me food...
... I was thirsty... and you gave me drink...
... I was homeless... you gave me a room...
... I was cold... you gave cloths...
... I was sick... you visited...
... I was in prison... you came to me...

Doing all of these is just as much of an act of worship as showing up for Sunday church service. In my mind, it is more than just worship. You are demonstrating kindness. The act of showing up to benefit someone in need is loving kindness and an act of worship. Showing kindness is an act of sacrificial worship that makes God smile. Go ahead - today do some sacrificial worship kindness to someone you encounter.

Let us Pray: *Lord God, you gave me everything I need to be a sacrificial act of worship to another person. Help me today to be kind to those I encounter as an act of kindness. Amen*



Saturday, March 14, 2020

Text: 1Timothy 1:2

“Timothy, because of your faith, you are like a son to me. I pray that God our father and Lord Jesus Christ will be kind and merciful to you.”

As we close out this week of reflections, I hope you have been able to model kindness this week. Paul’s love of Timothy impacted him so much that Paul’s prayer is for God to bless him with kindness. Paul was a spiritual mentor to Timothy and Timothy learned much from him. But now Timothy had to take that learning and put it into practice, and to demonstrate to the people of Timothy’s church how kindness can impact their community of faith in positive ways.

The spiritual journey is not always what we hope it would be. We fail to keep the practices that keep us grounded. We fail to walk the path of kindness sometimes. We are challenged to love people and to love God in the full measure that we desire. However, God doesn’t let go of us. God is holding on when we slip...when we fail...when we are challenged.

But God is present, and God keeps us moving forward so I hope that we are able to keep on keeping on by continually practicing being kind.

We began this week talking about kindness and that kindness is a choice...
That there is a difference between being nice and being kind...
Kindness is a virtue to hone and needs to be practiced...
To find common ground means we may need to be the higher ground...
We learned that being kind is an act of worship that propels us to serve...
And lastly, sacrificial kindness is a way to worship our God.

So, I hope you choose kindness and practice, practice, practice...

Let us Pray: *God, you have given us the reason to be kind. You have given us the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to guide us in our choices and in our lives of faith. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us into choosing KINDNESS each day of our lives. Amen.*

