

“Kindness”
May 29, 2011
Grove Presbyterian Church

Old Testament Lesson

II Samuel 9: 1-8

David asked, “Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and he was summoned to David. The king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” And he said, “At your service!” The king said, “Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?” Ziba said to the king, “There remains a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet.” The king said to him, “Where is he?” Ziba said to the king, “He is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.”

Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance.

David said, “Mephibosheth!” He answered, “I am your servant.” David said to him, “Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you yourself shall eat at my table always.” He did obeisance and said, “What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I?”

New Testament Lesson and Reflection

Something about baptisms and babies. All those parental hopes we have as we present our babies to the world.

All those hopes of what we want our children to be....

Successful? Wealthy? Important? Smart?

In my old age now, and after hundreds of baptisms, I’ve learned one thing: if it comes down to a choice between really, really clever, and really, really kind, I’ll take kindness any day.

In my old age, I am finding clever persons tiresome. Those who have to impress you by putting down others and showing off how smart they are.

The clever people bring us fracking. They bring us national debts. They bring us wars, appointment books, rules, and being busy doing something.

Let's take heart over smarts any day.

Back in my first congregation two new persons showed up at worship the same day.
Tiny church
Fairly conspicuous they were new. We had visitors!

It was the day of Doris and the professor.

The professor was someone who moved into our small town recently. Small town indeed. Not even a traffic light.

Doris had grown up there but always wanted to come to church but never felt she'd belong. Never graduated from high school. Worked in the nearby factory. Lived in a trailer with Big Jim, toothless, gruff, and loud, who I knew from the Fire Company.

Their home had no running water. A latrine. They did have lots of guinea hens.

Members of the church rushed up during coffee hour and wanted me to be sure to follow up and make sure we get the professor as a new member. He would be a good addition.

Well, we contacted. We visited. He was curious about church. He thanked me politely.

We also visited Doris. She was thrilled we bothered. She made sure she set out her best mug so I could have coffee.

Guess, of course, who joined?

Guess who became a really dedicated Deacon?

Guess for whom joining the church really mattered?

Some of you might remember that lovely movie from the 1950's starring Jimmy Stewart as Elwood P. Dowd. Harvey (one of my favorites). Elwood has a invisible friend, a 6 foot 3 inch pooka (a big rabbit). Because his sister loves him, Elwood is about to be committed to an insane asylum. In one scene, he explains himself to the lovely nurse:

"Years ago my mother used to say to me, she'd say, 'In this world, Elwood, you must be" - she always called me Elwood – 'In this world, Elwood, you must be oh so smart or oh so pleasant.' Well, for years I was smart. I recommend pleasant. You may quote me."

Kindness hardly is an attribute of nature. Look around. Ask Joplin.

Nature cannot be kind – nature doesn't care – tornadoes, floods, viruses – they are indifferent. The world is cold enough without us making it colder.

Kindness then is proof of a Supra-Natural gift.
Kindness is deliberate, intentional, the opposite of indifferent
Kindness keeps us above nature.

It is quite easy to predict what will happen when we fail to be kind. We end up with these sad reason for Memorial Days.

*“Well, I've wrestled with reality for 35 years, Doctor,
and I'm happy to state I finally won out over it.”*
-- Elwood P. Dowd

Homonyms for kindness: benevolence, charity, unselfish, philanthropic, sympathy
Antonym of kindness: malevolence, malice, bad blood, ill-will, spiteful, cruel

Etymology: the English word shares origin with Kin, kinship
Kindness is a filial act
Person isn't an object but your brother, sister

Such as King David caring for his best friend's son as his own son.

Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, expects to be murdered by David, as he is of Saul's family. The usual way to secure your throne after deposing the previous king is to assassinate and execute any and all of his possible descendents, thus ridding yourself of threats to your right to sit on the throne.

David does the unusual.

Mephibosheth is amazed that David is sincere in showing kindness, treating him as his own son. But the effect of David's kindness has a greater impact elsewhere.

You never really know the effect your kindness might have. It was important to Jonathan's son. But it had a bigger effect on someone else. That's what's behind this story.

See the domino effect of David's *hesed*, his generous kindness, this kindness of God, on Machir – a powerful and influential opponent of David who was hiding Jonathan's son -- is to turn Machir into a supporter of David and persuade others to accept him as the true King of Israel.

When were persons kind to you?

- Giving you a lift?
- Or the American Legion giving us a big donation to make sure the summer concerts continue this summer.
- Trying to calm the frantic mother with the crying child at the grocery check out?
- Someone in the church once said how that thing that gave her hope in the midst of being abused by her husband were the brownies and cookies left on her doorstep by a neighbor, telling her, "I care and I know."

When weren't they kind when you needed someone to be kind?

Once someone thought they were being kind. Her intentions were kindly but really quite thoughtless. She was clearing out her house. She knew we were going to Honduras on a mission trip. She knew just what we needed to take down to Honduras. So, without checking with us first, she showed up one day and dropped off two full sets of Encyclopedias.

And we were going to pack them in our bags and carry them with us on the airplane to Honduras? Where? In the overhead compartment?

Oh yes. They also were in English. They speak Spanish in Honduras.

Once again, there was another person who thought he was being kind to his family. He loved them dearly. But he felt how -- given his pain, his deepening depression, his sense of failure -- that as his final act of love he hanged himself. But this isn't a kindness -- it is a terrible distortion caused by selfishness. He is caught up in the horrible delusion of thinking that this is kindness, is somehow noble, when all suicide does is leave his wife and children and nephews a cruel, tortured mess.

The Greek word for kindness -- *chrestotes* -- refers to a genuine, guileless goodness of heart. Pleasantly gracious.

Kindness means you have to do the unnatural and unzip your skin and step out of yourself.

Unzip your skin and step out of yourself.

Then kindness can turn the world around

Let's finish with Paul's words to his friends at Colossae about how to live as Christ's men and women, what we want to create for our little boys and girls (and note, there's nothing here about having to be really really clever):

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. -- Colossians 3: 12-17

Memorialize our Deceased Members Since Last Memorial Day (bell to toll)

Who casts not up his eye to the sun when it rises? but who takes off his eye from a comet when that breaks out? Who bends not his ear to any bell which upon any occasion rings? but who can remove it from that bell which is passing a piece of himself out of this world? No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.
--**John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation 17***

Toll the Bell:

- ➔ The first for all soldiers who did not return home
- ➔ For victims of natural disasters
- ➔ For all victims of war
- ➔ For all those close to us who have died this year
- ➔ For those church members whom we name who have joined the Church Triumphant since last Memorial Day:

Name

1. Robert E. Carey
2. Janie D. Cotner
3. Paulina Jeffreys

Date of Death

- September 28, 2010
- 16 October, 2010
- 30 December, 2010