

November 15, 2020

The Power of Kindness  
Galatians 5:19-26

**Opening words:** For the majority of the past five weeks, I have been battling the Coronavirus. I spent five days in the hospital and found myself going back to the emergency room because I just was not making any progress. I lost complete track of time and did not do well processing information. I lost twenty pounds. The worst part was not the isolation and it was the exhaustion. I still battle that today. For the first time in my life, I was the one who needed help. There were days my one exhausting activity was showering. I am eternally grateful to my wife, who I frightened, who cared for me during those dark hours, as she battled the Coronavirus, herself. I am thankful to be part of a church, which expressed their kindness to me. I have been told it will take an extended period to completely recover. I have no reason to doubt those claims. I see things differently now. Please do not stop praying for me. It is important that you know I am no longer contagious, and it is important that you know I get stronger every day. I am thankful to be here today. This is also the truth. Some are afraid to be near me. I have become part of the challenge of returning inside.

At some point, I began to wonder what Bible verse I would preach when I returned. That is no small decision. After all, I could choose any verse in the whole Bible. My decision did not take long. One Bible verse kept going through my mind. It was our scripture reading for this morning, Galatians 5:19-26. Let me call this message *The Power of Kindness*.

**Galatians 5:19-26** The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking, and envying each other.

Twenty-two miles outside of Lynchburg, Virginia is Appomattox Court House. Still undeveloped, it is one of the great spots in American history. For it was at that place on April 9, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee (1807-1870) surrendered to Commanding General of the United States Army Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885), effectively ending the American Civil War. History tells us when the day began, Lee expected to be arrested and charged with treason. However, instead of experiencing incarceration, Lee, and his remaining army, experienced kindness. The terms of the

surrender revealed Grant's kindness. The Confederate Army was permitted to return home. The officers, cavalymen, artillerymen were permitted to keep their swords and horses, and their men were asked to lay down their weapons and swore an alliance to the federal government. Food was shared generously. Lee never forgot that kindness. History also tells us he refused to hear a negative word about Grant after the war. On several occasions, he defended Grant. Can I ask a question? How many people defend you because of your kindness? Never underestimate the power of kindness. That leads us to today's scripture lesson.

We find ourselves today in the Paul's letter to the Galatians. In our time, we call Galatia north central Asia Minor. For our use, let me say it was written about the year 50 AD. The issue is Old Testament traditions and laws. Should new converts observe Old Testament ways? The Galatians believed they should still be practiced. Men should be circumcised, and Old Testament laws should be enforced. Paul believed differently. He said we were new people born again in Christ, so the Old Testament ways had passed. All believers were liberated from Old Testament ways. The entire fifth chapter has been called Freedom in Christ.

Our reading for today has been called Life in the Spirit. As a believer in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit should be making a difference in your life. How much of a difference is the Holy Spirit making in your life? Paul says there is a sharp contrast between those who are living without the Holy Spirit's influence and those living with the Holy Spirit's influence. Let us look at them both briefly. Those who are living without the Holy Spirit are living sinful lives, sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, and the rest. The Holy Spirit, within believers, produces certain Christian virtues. What are those virtues?

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Forbearance or patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-Control

Let me say it again. It is the Holy Spirit which produces those virtues within us. They are not produced by obeying Old Testament law. That is an impressive list. If I had more time, then I would turn that list into a sermon series. Unfortunately, I do not have time, so I am going to only focus in on one, kindness. The reason is obvious, during my time away I experienced the kindness of this congregation and I will never forget what it meant to me.

This is not the only place in the Bible where kindness mentioned. The theme of kindness is peppered throughout the scriptures. In the Old Testament:

Proverbs 11: 17 says, "A man who is kind benefits himself, but a man who is cruel hurts himself."

Proverbs 21:21 says, "Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life."

Proverbs 31:26 says, "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teachings of kindness are on her tongue."

In the New Testament:

Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted."

Colossians 3:12 says, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience."

1 Corinthians 13:4 says, "Love is patient and kind."

You cannot debate the fact that Jesus was not kind. Jesus was kind to the leper. Do you remember? Jesus came down from the mountainside and the crowd met him. In the crowd as a rule breaker, a leper. He was supposed to stay at a safe distance. Instead, he kneels before Jesus and asks to be healed. Then, Jesus broke the rules when he reached out and touched the man. It is a great healing story. It is a great story of kindness. (Matthew 8:1-4) Jesus was kind to the tax collector, Zacchaeus. Do you remember the story? Short, Zacchaeus is sitting in a tree so he can see Jesus. He is also in the tree for protection. The general population hated him. He sold his own people out for profit. In the end, everyone is happy. The people are reimbursed for the tax collector's misdeeds and Zacchaeus is happy because Jesus dines with him. It was an act acceptance. It is a story of great kindness. (Luke 19:1-10.) Jesus was kind to the woman at the well. Do you remember the story? Jesus is traveling and stops at a well to rest. He encounters a Samaritan woman, a half-bred. She is a sinner, married five times and now living with a man who was not her husband. Jesus did not condemn her. Jesus showed her kindness and offered her salvation. It is a story about evangelism, but it is also a story about kindness. (John 4:1-26) Jesus was always kind to common people, like us, who had been forgotten by society. This is the point. As a disciple of Jesus Christ you are expected to kind. So, be kind. And all of God's kind people said, "**Amen!**" Aesop (624 BCE-564 BCE) once said, "*No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.*"

There is an old preaching story about a woman by the name of Mamie Adams. She is not remembered for anything special in history. She was just an ordinary person, like me. One the things she enjoyed doing was going to the post office. She went there to buy stamps just before Christmas one year and the lines were particularly long. Someone pointed out that there was no need to wait in line because there was a stamp machine in the lobby. "I know," said Mamie, "but the machine won't ask me about my arthritis." Never underestimate the power of kindness.

We are always hearing that America is changing. That is not debatable. America is changing in many ways. I am not just talking about science, technology, and medicine. I am talking in the heart of the average American. Is America as kind today as it was decades ago. It is a fair question. I have my personal doubts. I feel like every other person I know is taking a stand or telling you the way it is. They are more interested in being heard than anything else. They are more interested in being heard, then they are how their harsh words affect you.

Sociologists tell us the issue is more an old-fashioned selfishness. They say our national problems are weighing us down, smothering our national kindness. They may be right. Consider these facts with me. According the U.S. Census Bureau in 2016, 43% of Americans are living in poverty. How would your life change if you were forced to live on minimum wage? Americans are taking on more debt, and they are saving less. Wages have been at the same level since 1999. Student debt is exploding. Did you know as a country we owe \$1.6 trillion in student loans? As a country we owe \$1.03 trillion in credit card debt. Household savings are non-existent. Medical expenses are out of control. Add in the national election, racism and the pandemic and we are in quite a mess. The amount of national stress is at pandemic levels. Our national stress is eroding away at our national kindness. That is why when we experience kindness it affects us profoundly.

Kindness is important for several reasons.

1. Kindness makes us happy.
2. Kindness lowers our stress.
3. Kindness improves ourself-esteem.
4. Kindness lowers our depression.

This is my pastoral advice for you. Keep being kind. Keep sending those cards. Keep sending those texts. Keep baking those meals. Keep praying. Keep caring. Do not ever underestimate the power of kindness. Each act of kindness is a small light who is living through a dark day.

It must has been three weeks ago as of tomorrow. I was home from the hospital, but I had a long way to go. I felt like a broken person. The highlight of that day was a phone call from my doctor. My family and I have gone to him for years. He has seen us through various illnesses. We trust him because he cares about us. At some level, I like to think of him as a friend. However, I would never call him by his first name, Bill. I respect him too much. When the phone rang at 2:45, I mustered all the strength I could gather. At first, we reviewed my recent past. I told him about my trip to the hospital and my trip to the emergency room. At some point he asked me about how I was doing on that day. I told him I was exhausted and a felt like I had let everyone in my life down. I let my wife, who was also recovering, down by being a burden. I worried my children. I let my church down. I let God down because I just could not

function. This was the first time being in need. Do you know what I did next? I cried. I do not mean a few tears. I mean, I cried like a baby. Ok, I wailed. I had told others that, but they just dismissed emotions. The theme was, "Don't be silly, you haven't let anyone down. You just got sick. It is a worldwide pandemic." As I wailed with my doctor, he said something new." He said, "I understand." He said, "Russ, do you know what I fear? I do not fear getting the virus and dying. I fear getting the virus and not being able to work. People are dependent on me and people are dependent on you too. You are overwhelmed with responsibility. It is hard to be a giving person when you cannot give." Those kind compassionate words were like pouring salve on my open wounds. I felt like there was one person in the world who understood. I cannot do this job at 30%. And, I have no clue how to do this job in isolation. Then, he said, "Russ, give it time. Everything is going to be fine. Just give it time."

When I got off the phone, I thought about is kind words. We did not talk about my oxygen level. We did not talk about my drugs. We did not talk about my heart rate or my blood pressure. I know those things are important, but we are more than a science project. All I did was talk and all he did was listen. He gave me time and and compassion when I needed it. He showed me kindness when I needed kindness. He gave me a small light on a dark day. Never underestimate the power of kindness. Perhaps, it was a coincidence, perhaps not. A few hours later I turned the corner, and I began to heal. Never underestimate the power of kindness.

Do the people in your life consider you kind? I believe they do because you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. It it the Holy Spirit who creates that virtue within you. Aesop was not wrong. He said, "*No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.*" And all of God's kind people said, "**Amen!**"