

First Presbyterian Church Birmingham, MI
"What Does the World Need Now?"
Rev. Lou Nyiri
January 21, 2024

Proverbs 16:23-24 / Ephesians 4:25-32

Our first and second testament readings are Proverbs 16:23-24 / Ephesians 4:25-32, let's lean in and listen with fresh ears that we might hear anew God's word for us this day.

Scripture

Proverbs 16:23-24 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

²³ The mind of the wise makes their speech judicious
and adds persuasiveness to their lips.

²⁴ Pleasant words are like a honeycomb,
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

Ephesians 4:25-32 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

Rules for the New Life

²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with your neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; ^[a] do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸ Those who steal must give up stealing; rather, let them labor, doing good work with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up, ^[b] as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

The Word of the Lord / **Thanks be to God**

Let us pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the fire and burn,
Come as the wind and cleanse,
Come as the light and reveal,
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:

That the words of my mouth

And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Sermon

Be. Ye. Kind.

Those three words were printed on a poster that hung in the back hallway entrance to our family home for many years.

The poster hung in that hallway because it was the place we would leave from and return back to each day.

We wanted those words to be the basis for our interactions in the community around us and the family we were creating each day.

“Be. Ye. Kind.”

Solid words to live by!

Gail Rosenblum wrote an article for the Star Tribune (Minneapolis), it was titled, “Fifth-graders combat bullying by adding kindness to the curriculum.”

Following the lead of their fifth-grade teacher, Matt Greenhoe, who noted no “major problems” among his students as they interact with one another, however, he did say, “But we could use a little more kindness in our school.”

About a dozen of his fifth graders at Parker Elementary School founded what they call the “Kindness Club.”

Every Tuesday they give up recess to gather in the school social worker’s office to plan events and kindness challenges.

A key driver in the club, Ady Bellinger, who said the club’s mission,

*[I]s to stop bullying and improve self-esteem!
Most of all, it is to spread kindness to the school!*

The Kindness Club placed a poster in the school which read, “Bullies not allowed in our house.” They placed affirmation stickers on student lockers.

Sometimes the kindness is as simple as giving attention to a kindergartener crying in the hall.

11-year-old member Elsie Osterme said, “It just feels good helping kids. Sometimes, it’s hard for a kid to go to an adult. It’s easier to go to a kid your age.”

Highlighting the positive impact of these students’ everyday efforts, Greenhoe said, “Other kids are seeing that being kind is cool. It’s having a ripple effect. I really have seen a change in attitudes.”

This follows what organizations like ‘Random Acts of Kindness [dot] org’ have been positing – namely kindness is teachable.

Dr. Ritchie Davidson from the University of Wisconsin, writes, “It’s like weight training, we found that people can actually build up their compassion ‘muscle’ and respond to others’ suffering with care and a desire to help.”

Kindness also has a way of being downloaded into the fabric of one’s being, as those fifth graders at Parker Elementary School showed, the positive effects of kindness are experienced in the brain of everyone who witnesses the act. It improves the mood and makes one significantly more likely to “pay it forward.” This means one good deed in a crowded area can create a domino effect and improve the day of dozens of people!

Kindness is life-changing!

Happiness researcher, Sean Achor, demonstrated through extensive research that if you perform random acts of kindness for two minutes a day for twenty-one days, you can retrain your brain to be more positive. Studies show when your brain is more positive you are more

likely to be creative, intelligent and productive. These attributes can become what we call 'quality of life' attributes: job success / wealth / healthy relationships / and better health.

According to Random Acts of Kindness [dot] org,

Kindness increases:

- Witnessing acts of kindness produces oxytocin – which aids in lowering blood pressure and improving overall heart-health – oxytocin can also increase self-esteem and optimism.
- Kindness increases energy and lifespan
 - Citing the work of Christine Carter in her book, *Raising Happiness: In Pursuit of Joyful Kids and Happier Parents*, “People who volunteer tend to experience fewer aches and pains. People 55 and older who volunteer for two or more organizations have an impressive 44% lower likelihood of dying early, and that’s after sifting out every other contributing factor, including physical health, exercise, habits like smoking, and many more. This,” according to Carter, “is a stronger effect than exercising four times a week or going to church.”
 - *[On behalf of health care professionals and ministers everywhere, let me say something about that concluding statement – I am not advocating you give up the gym or your pew – I’m advocating you add kindness to your weekly body and spiritual exercise routine – you just might live well into your 100s.]*
- Kindness can lower stress levels – perpetually kind people have 23% less cortisol (the stress hormone) and age slower than the average population!

Remember it’s not just those who “do kind acts” who benefit – the effects of witnessing kindness change people and communities – whether they knew it or not, the fifth graders at Parker Elementary were tapping into the science of kindness.

Jamil Zaki, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University and Director of the Stanford Social Neuroscience Lab conducted a series of studies to observe how witnessing acts of kindness inspires the spread of kindness. The studies’ conclusion, “by emphasizing empathy-positive norms, we may be able to leverage the power of social influence to combat apathy and conflict in new ways.”

People underestimate the profound effect of a simple act of Kindness. Kindness may be one of the most meaningful, fulfilling and world-changing life-skills. It is both selfless and selfish – because, according to the research, the one who is kind benefits as well – so go on and be selfish by being kind.

Let’s not forget that kindness is also one of the *Fruits of the Spirit* – something we can cultivate and grow in our lives and communities – as we become intentional in our practice of kindness – kindness grows around us.

Perhaps you prefer The Dalai Lama who has been quoted as saying, “Be Kind Whenever Possible. It is always possible.”

Our Ephesians passage put it thus, ²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up, ³⁰ as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³¹ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and

slander, together with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.”

Our proverbs passage reminds us, “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.”

The faculty, teachers and staff of a high school sought to create a learning environment and culture around the following three ideals:

Be Here.

Be Involved.

Be Committed.

Around January 2019 they added as fourth aspect to what they called “[Their] Way.”

It was in response to the story of Rachel Scott, the first victim in the Columbine High School shooting in 1999. Rachel’s father had visited this high school and talked about Rachel’s Challenge which seeks to inspire everyone to replace acts of violence, bullying, and negativity with acts of **respect, kindness, and compassion**.

After that visit, this high school added the following to their vision statement: Be Kind.

Be Here.

Be Kind.

Be Involved.

Be Committed.

Our family had a morning ritual as we headed out the back hallway entrance toward school, Candace would recite to Alex, the following, hoping it would download into the fabric of his life:

“Don’t forget...be courteous, be courageous, and be kind.

What’s the greatest commandment, ‘Love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself.’”

Be Courteous.

Be Courageous.

Be Kind.

Be Here.

Be Kind.

Be Involved.

Be Committed.

Love God.

Love Neighbor.

Love self.

Be. Ye. Kind. Every act of kindness creates a ripple that goes on with no end in sight.

Let’s outdo one another in being kind – for that’s something the world needs now and always! Amen and Amen.¹

¹ Works cited: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-power-of-kindness_b_12772034 ; <https://thinkkindness.org/the-scientific-impact-of-kindness/> ; https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-power-of-kindness_n_8106510 ; <https://www.dartmouth.edu/wellness/emotional/rakhealthfacts.pdf>