

5-3-20

“Give it up!”

Pastor Diana Ziegler

Scripture reference: Matthew 7:7-12 and Colossians 3:12-14

Each month I spend a day or two looking at scripture, reading bible commentary, stories in books I own or find on the internet, and I plan out the coming month. When I was spending time planning for the month of May, I was having a really good week! I found wonderful inspiration for each of the themes I had chosen - some matching the Lectionary for this year and some going “off grid” so to speak. I was feeling uplifted, optimistic, and truly blessed that I would be able to talk with you about how the word of God is so incredibly relevant and necessary for us today. I was very excited to tackle this theme of “kindness” that I chose for today, but had to get through the rest of April before I could really focus on this message. And then something happened between my time of planning and time to prepare for today’s service... I don’t know what it was, I just know that for whatever reason, this message became a real chore for me. I was becoming frustrated with myself, and with God for not putting the right combination of thoughts or the right words into my mind. At the same time I was thinking how grateful I am that the people I speak to every Sunday are incredibly gracious and would probably be forgiving if I gave a message that didn’t really speak to the heart...

So, I walked away from my desk and did some laundry and some work outside and just didn’t think about today for a little while. In doing so, I had some, what I thought were irrelevant, conversations with Dave and my friend Kelly. Based on the words we shared, a thought sort of “slow motioned” itself into my mind... Kindness isn’t just about behaviors we show to other people, kindness is also something we need to be showing to ourselves. I, like so very many of you, have been working in different ways, learning new things, spending hours thinking about how we might do whatever, or would it be possible to do whatever; or trying to simply do too much, particularly now, to make up for the loss of the way things have always worked...

There is a lot that I want to share with you about kindness today, and about how it is God’s will that we be kind to each other, that we show kindness in everything we do; but I also want to share with you that being kind to yourself is something God wants for us too. And I hope I can do this in a way that makes at least a little bit of sense - sometimes the stuff in my head doesn’t always come out very clearly...

Let me start by sharing a story with you that I found on the internet. It is a story that takes place in some other country - I don’t remember which - and it revolves around an elderly gentleman and a young lady who are taking a train...

An elderly gentleman boarded a train with a ticket marked “no seat”. What that meant was that he spent less money on his train ticket and would take his journey standing and hanging onto the bars and the poles running the center of the train car. It was also acceptable that if there was an empty seat, a person with a “no seat” ticket would be allowed to occupy that seat. As the gentleman boarded the train, he couldn’t see any empty seats. He went down the aisle to a bar and a pole meant for holding during travel. A young woman sat in seat 27b right next to that spot, and upon seeing the weariness in the gentleman’s face and body, offered him her seat. He was hesitant, but she insisted he take the seat, saying she only had a few hours to travel and would be fine standing. Grateful, the elderly gentleman took the seat and within minutes had fallen into a pretty deep sleep. At this point the Porter came by to check tickets. He saw the man’s ticket in his breast pocket and took it out to stamp it. In

doing so, he saw the “no seat” marking on his ticket. He then took the young woman’s ticket and noted it was marked seat #27b - a quick glance to the seat back of where the man was sleeping showed the Porter that this man was in this woman’s seat. She hushed the Porter with a smile and nodded approvingly and empathetically to the sleeping man. The Porter smiled in understanding and then offered the woman an empty seat in the car ahead of them. She graciously accepted, took both of her crutches off of the luggage rack and followed the Porter to the next car.

Now the pictures that were included with this story included pictures of the faces of the other passengers who appeared to be feeling quite humbled by the fact that a crippled woman would give up her seat to a person in need, but they did nothing... And then the moral of the story was printed: “Real Kindness is when you are ready to give up something that you need yourself.”

In the dictionary kindness is defined as the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate; being kind often requires courage and strength. The woman on that train showed true kindness.

Now I don’t know if this particular story is true or not, but it is a believable story - and It got me thinking about how people behave...

According to research, the most common words in the English language are “I”, “Me,” “My,” and “Mine”. What does that tell us? To me, it says that we are pretty selfish people. People who are filled with selfish pride, selfish wants, desire for personal comfort, and quite frankly, pretty greedy... None of which seems to tie in too closely with being kind... And yet, I know a zillion times more people who are kind than people who are unkind. How is that possible? As odd as it may sound, some of the kindness we see in others is grounded in selfishness. We read in Proverbs 11:17: “Those who are kind benefit themselves, but the cruel bring ruin on themselves.”

“Well that’s just great Pastor, people are only kind to others for selfish gain?” That is what that sounds like, but that is not the message. Selfish pride, vanity, and selfish gain MAY be some of the motivation for showing kindness, but kindness is one of those things that sort of “snow balls” on you. Once you start showing kindness, it sort of takes over everything and then it’s hard NOT to be kind.

I propose that kindness then undergoes a metamorphosis of sorts, creating in its wake an actual kind person... And as we continue to study scripture, we hear more about the truth behind that verse in proverbs... That being a kind person is very beneficial...

In the Gospel of Luke chapter 6 we read: *Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.*(Luke 6: 30)

I know of a woman who did her laundry one evening and hung her clothes to dry overnight. She was very upset when she discovered that sometime during the night, someone had taken a good portion of the clothing she had hung to dry. She was visibly angry but was not calling the police. When questioned about that, she replied: “Someone obviously needed the clothing or they wouldn’t have taken it. It just makes me mad that they didn’t ask, I would have given it to them.” This woman’s behavior exemplifies the verse in Luke...

In our scripture reading today in Colossians: *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* (Colossians 3:12) and our Gospel reading in Matthew: *So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you...* (Matthew 7:12)

We can look back at our story about the woman on the train... She was most certainly compassionate and kind; and I imagined she hoped that if she were old and tired, someone would behave the same way toward her...

From Proverbs 3: *Don't ever stop being kind and truthful. Let kindness and truth show in all you do.... Then you will be respected and pleasing to both God and man.* (Proverbs 3:3-4 ICB)

This verse brings us right back to the beginning of this rather choppy and disjointed message... In being kind to myself, allowing myself to "breathe" a little, it was easier to be truthful with you about my own journey this week. Being truthful with you about the message I wanted to share today - even about some of my own discomfort - is the kind thing to do.

And all of the verses I have just shared with you are part of a chapter of verses that include in some form or another the fact that being a kind person will bring you respect, win God's favor, and fill your life with blessings from our Heavenly Father.

I've come to the end of this train of thought...

I hope I have been able to make enough sense of my own thinking to help you see the virtues of kindness; that kindness is what God wants us to show to each other AND to ourselves.

This little ride we've been on today leads us to the title of this message: "Give it up". Let these three words become your mantra of sorts; and when you hear them remember that they mean to give up your selfish pride, your selfish wants, at times your comfort and your greed. They also mean that you should give up as many kind words as you can think of; and as many kind and respectful gestures as there are to match whatever situation you find yourself.

Just "Give it up".

Let us pray:

Merciful and loving God, be with us as we meet those who irritate and anger us - including the person we meet in the mirror. Help us to remember that we are all your beloved children. Remind us to love ourselves as you have loved, to love others as you have loved; and guide us to be kind. Kindness is the best way we have in which to show others the glory of your kingdom. AMEN.