

Sermon Notes - June 28, 2020
“The Kindness of a Stranger”
(Luke 10:25-37)

Have you ever been the recipient of the kindness of a stranger? About a week ago, I went through the drive-through at Krispy Kreme in Hickory to get a donut and a coke. When I got to the window to get my food and pay, the clerk says, “You don’t owe anything. The lady in front of you paid for your food and said to tell you to have a blessed day.” Wow – was I surprised and grateful! A couple of weeks ago, one of our fellow church members said that happened to her at a restaurant drive-through – a stranger paid for her meal in advance.

Our Gospel lesson today is about a stranger helping a man in need. Jesus had been teaching and preaching and afterwards, an expert in Jewish law came to Jesus and asked about how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus asked the man, “What does the law and the scriptures say?” The man responds with, “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength – and love your neighbor as yourself.” The Scribes and Pharisees (including this lawyer) were always trying to find things wrong with what Jesus said. The lawyer looked for a loophole and asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus proceeds to tell the man a story – and we know it as “The Parable of the Good Samaritan.” Jesus shares how a man was going from Jerusalem to Jericho (about 20 miles) on business and was attacked by robbers, beaten, stripped, and left for dead. Three men passed by the beaten man on the side of the road – one, a Jewish priest, walked right passed the injured man and so did the Jewish Levite (a helper in the Temple). But, the Samaritan felt compassion at the sight of the man and stopped to help him. This Samaritan extended kindness and mercy to the man.

Now, we don’t know for sure why the Jewish priest and the Levite didn’t stop. Scholars do tell us that if they thought the man on the side of the road was dead, they would have refused to touch him for fear of contamination and making them ritually unclean for service in the Temple that day. Maybe they were too busy and had somewhere to be –

but for whatever reason, these two men did not stop to render aid to the injured man. Jesus makes a point about the Samaritan being the person who gave aid to the beaten man on the side of the road. Keep in mind that Samaritans were considered “half-breeds and outcasts” by the Jews. The Samaritans were Jews who intermarried with other races of people after the exile of the Israelites. It is believed that the injured man on the road was a Jew and here was a Samaritan showing compassion and kindness to a Jew. Jews despised and hated Samaritans - but this stranger (a Samaritan) felt pity and compassion, bandaged up the man’s wounds, put him on his donkey, took him to an inn to rest and recuperate - and even paid the innkeeper for the injured man’s food, lodging, and medical care.

Jesus proceeds to ask the lawyer (the expert in the law), “So, which of these three men was a neighbor to the man beaten by robbers?” The lawyer said, “The one who showed mercy.” Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.”

This Jewish lawyer knew what the scriptures said about loving God and loving your neighbor - but he thought his neighbor was another Jew. Jesus wanted him to know that your neighbor is anyone in need - regardless of race, color, creed, or nationality - including this Samaritan who was hated by Jews. Jesus wanted this lawyer to put into practice what the scriptures said about loving your neighbor (not just the Jews just like him).

Our first New Testament reading this morning was Galatians 5:22-23, which says, “But the fruit of the spirit is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” God wants us to grow in Christ-likeness - and the Spirit tries to grow, within us, these qualities of Christ-like character.

Did you ever notice that one of those qualities we are to exhibit is **kindness**? Jesus calls us to rise above the standard of the world. The world says, “Be kind and help those who are kind to you” or “I’ll scratch

your back if you scratch mine.” Jesus wants us to extend kindness not just to those who are kind to us or family or close friends. He wants us to extend kindness to strangers, to anyone in need, to even those who have wronged us or don’t like us or we don’t like them. Remember how Jesus was kind to all people – He took time to hold, touch, and bless the little children even when the disciples pushed them away; He touched and healed a man with leprosy (even when Jewish law stated that touching a leper would make you unclean). Jesus was kind, compassionate, and merciful to the rich and the poor, kids or adults, sinner or saint. Jesus noticed a despised tax collector named Zacchaeus and spent time with him, even when the Jews rejected Zacchaeus.

As I was preparing for this sermon today, I thought about ways we show kindness – sometimes it’s exhibited by words, sometimes by a physical touch, sometimes by spending time with someone who needs it, sometimes by an act of service or generosity, etc.

I want to share some stories of kindness I came across in preparation for this sermon. Some of you remember former President Ronald Reagan. When he was still the governor of California and running for President of the United States, he had a rally in North Carolina. After the rally was over, a teacher from the blind school in Raleigh went up to Reagan’s Chief of Staff and asked if Reagan would have time to speak to a group of blind children who wanted to meet him. Reagan agreed to do it, but only after all the reporters and photographers had left the scene. Reagan’s Chief of Staff, Michael Deaver, took the teacher and the seven blind kids (ages 9 and 10) around the back of the stadium platform to see Reagan. Governor Reagan shook hands with the kids and asked them to sit down on the floor in a circle with him. He asked them questions about school, the family, etc. Then he asked if they would like to touch his face – to get a feel of what he looked like. They giggled with glee and, one by one, they touched his nose, his mouth, his ears, and his hair. When all seven kids finished touching his face, he stood up and gave them each a hug and said goodbye. Michael Deaver (Reagan’s Chief of Staff) said, “I went home that night seeing over and over in my mind the picture of Governor Reagan (Presidential candidate) sitting on the floor with those blind kids,

letting them each touch his face and I knew then the kind of man he was. He expressed his kindness to those kids by spending time with them and by sending the reporters and photographers away - so this time was about them and him - and not a good photo shoot as Presidential candidate.”

Let me share another type of kindness: Dr. Paul Brand was a medical missionary doctor in India for many years. During part of the time he spent in India, he worked with a colony of lepers. One day he was examining a man with leprosy and he placed his hand on the shoulder of the man with leprosy and looked him in the face and told him how he would treat the man’s disease. The leprous patient began to weep and Dr. Brand thought he had done or said something to offend the patient. Through a language translator, he learned the patient was crying because it was the first time anyone had touched him in the ten years he had leprosy. The kindness of this doctor’s touch meant so very much to this leprosy patient. **Sometimes the kindness we need is quality time; sometimes the kindness we need is a hug or a pat on the back - a touch.**

We never know when the kindness we share with a stranger may plant a seed of eternity in the heart of someone. I can’t help but share a funny story I read. A widowed lady lived in the country about five miles out of town. Her close neighbor was a non-believer in God and wanted nothing to do with God or the church. This widowed lady raised chickens and sold eggs to make a little extra money. One day, one of her hens got loose and went into the yard of her unbelieving neighbor. He got mad, caught that hen, wrung its neck, and threw it back into the yard of its owner - the next door neighbor (the widowed lady). She saw what happened from her window and picked up the chicken, cleaned it, and cooked it. She went to see the unbelieving neighbor, knocked on the door, and when he opened the door, she handed him a platter of hot fried chicken and said, “Enjoy your dinner” and left. She did something kind and nice for this guy when he was not nice to her. Would you believe that about a week after that, he started coming out in the yard and initiating conversations with her? Weeks later, he attended church with her - and a

few months later, became a professing Christian. We don't always know or get to see the results of our kindness, like this widowed lady did, but God sees and knows how we treat others - even those who aren't always nice or kind or courteous to us.

Sometimes, Jesus' teachings instruct us to go beyond what the ordinary person is apt to do. In her book, "Profiles in Courage," former Congresswoman Barbara Cubin of Wyoming tells how her character was shaped by her parents. Her parents divorced when she was young, and a few years later, her mother remarried. Her stepfather was a good, kind, and hardworking man. She said that one time her biological birth father was on the way to Wyoming to see her, and somewhere on the road, he made a stop and was beaten and robbed. Somebody on the road stopped and called the paramedics. When they got her father to the hospital, they searched his pants pockets for any kind of identification, found his ex-wife's phone number, and called her home. Congresswoman Cubin's stepfather answered the phone. He stopped what he was doing, went to the hospital, paid her father's hospital bill that day, took him to a local motel, and paid his room and board for three or four nights - enough for him to recover and go home. "I don't see that happen much with second marriages," she said, "But my stepfather's kindness to my birth father left a deep impression on me."

When we love our neighbor, we are loving God - and when we love God, we grow in loving our neighbor. Who is our neighbor? Anyone in need - regardless of race, color, creed, nationality or anything else. The Samaritan in our Gospel lesson didn't have to help the Jewish man beaten by robbers on the side of the road - but he felt pity and compassion and showed kindness and mercy.

It's not always easy or convenient to help someone in need; sometimes, it will require a sacrifice of our time or resources. You say, "Ms. Peggy, I want to help, but sometimes I don't feel safe." I believe that God wants us to use wisdom and common sense and to be safe - but when we can, to help in any way possible.

I want to close with a quote from Steve Grellet, a French-born Quaker who died in New Jersey in 1855 - "I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any fellow human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

May the Spirit of God continue to help us grow in kindness - even to a stranger or someone who has wronged us - for we never know when we may be the one God is using to plant a seed of eternity in the heart of someone. Amen.