

“Getting Tough about Kindness”

Date: March 7, 2021

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: John 2:13-25

Occasion: Lent 3, Year B

Themes: Justice, Anger, Kindness

Jesus lost it in the court yard of the Temple. He laid to waste the workplace of the money-changers. He turned over their tables, set the animals free and made a wreck of the place. He yelled at people, telling them to get out of there. To our minds, Jesus seems a bit out of character.

Perhaps he needed a *Snickers* bar, if you’ve ever seen their commercials. It jars our minds to try to reconcile our image of *Jesus meek and mild* with this image of him acting in such an angry way. But this morning I am going to suggest, Jesus is *not* out of character.

Instead, I want us to see that what Jesus did *was* an act of kindness. There are times when we as Christians must act strongly, even though our actions might be misinterpreted and seen as unkind or unloving. There are times when we need to get tough about kindness, and to realize we are being absolutely Christian.

There is a difference between being kind and acting kindly. We tend to sentimentalize kindness and confuse it with *avoiding conflict at all costs*. Jesus was not acting kindly, or super-nice if you will. But what he did *was* a kind gesture, by interrupting injustice while it was taking place. Let’s take a closer look at what was going on, to see how Jesus showed kindness by his display of anger.

It must have been a shock to Jesus to see the evil taking place in the Temple Courtyard. Just to be clear, it wasn’t bad to see animals for sale, because that was part of the Temple practice. If religious pilgrims had traveled a long distance, it was a real service to them to have animals

available for purchase for them to offer for their sacrifice. They wouldn't have had to bring the animals along with them on their long journey.

No, *that* wasn't what bothered Jesus; it was the injustice which surrounded the practice. The priests were over-charging the people. They had a racket going on. People needed to have a perfect animal to sacrifice. The priests routinely found blemishes on the animals which people brought from home and charged them to buy one from the Temple.

Furthermore, the money-changers were ripping people off by charging them extra-high prices to have their money exchanged for the Temple currency. The priests, the holy men of God, were exploiting the Temple for their own profit and it infuriated Jesus.

When Jesus saw what was happening, he exploded. And yet, it was a kindness shown towards the people who were being exploited. Jesus demonstrated in these actions that God was opposed to injustice, especially when it was happening in God's house of prayer. Something needed to be done. It needed to be interrupted; it needed to be stopped.

Rather than preaching against it; rather than writing a letter to the local paper about it; rather than taking it to the Temple board of trustees to have them change their policy, Jesus decides to do something about it right then and there. He acted out of his sense of justice and kindness towards God's people.

I don't think he planned on doing this, when he came to Jerusalem. It was a spontaneous reaction to what he saw going on. He may have surprised even himself. He certainly surprised everyone around him. And so it is that sometimes kindness can surprise and even shock people.

But Jesus shows us that when there is an injustice going on, the kind thing to do is to stop it, to interrupt it, to do something about it. He showed

us we don't always have to take it to a committee to know what the right thing to do is. The Christian who is filled with the spirit of Jesus, who sees an injustice that needs to be corrected, just jumps in and does what needs to be done.

Kindness, if it means doing the right thing, might upset some people. I'm sure Jesus upset the priests at the Temple. Some scholars say this act in the Temple courtyard is actually what got Jesus killed. Why?- because he was attacking the very foundation of their income and wealth. There had been other so-called Messiahs, but this one threatened the Temple.

Friends, there may be times when you and I are called upon to act in the name of justice. It is the kind thing to do, even if it upsets some people. Let me give you a couple of examples. You're at a grocery store and a parent is overly berating a child and then turns to abusively hitting that child. The kind and loving thing to do is to step in and intervene.

Or, say you're with a group of friends, and someone starts to tell a story about someone else who isn't there, and it's obvious the intent is to malign the other person, you can interrupt and say, "I don't want to hear that story. That's gossip."

Young people, at school, will sometimes witness one student bullying another student. It takes courage, but it's the kind thing to do to interrupt it, to step in and say, "That's not right what you're doing. Stop it."

In one of my previous churches, at a trustees meeting, one of the members came in late and sat in a seat in the back of the room. Another trustee, thinking he was being friendly and helpful said, "Come sit at the table with us white folks."

It shocked the rest of us, that something so racist had just been uttered in our midst, that no one said a word. The kind thing, the right thing

to have done, would have been to call out that behavior and to let the person know how offensive and racist it was. For us not to say anything was not being kind, it was acting cowardly.

That's the thing. Too often we're afraid of hurting someone's feelings, or offending someone, or upsetting someone. We wrongly believe that as Christians we are to avoid conflict at all costs. We wrongly think we need to keep things nice and quiet and calm, and not ruffle anyone's feathers.

But that's not true. Sometimes the right thing to do is to speak up for what is right. Guess what, when you do, people might choose to become angry with you. As I said before, many scholars believe this incident in the Temple is what got Jesus killed – for confronting the status quo.

We as Christians need to find our courage to practice what is called “tough love,” or what I'm calling “tough kindness.” Tough love reminds people to do the right thing. Tough love confronts racism and bigotry. Tough love reminds people to be courteous.

We don't have to be ugly about it. But we shouldn't avoid it either. I know that sounds risky in today's environment. But I don't think it's any more risky today than it was in Jesus' time. Not speaking up isn't being kind; it's acting cowardly.

I'm not suggesting we become self-righteous or arrogant in the way we approach people. And we need to do our own self-examination to see where we may be wrong. Which is why it is so important for Christians to live in a community of faith. There we can talk about issues, get feedback from others, and support each other in our efforts to stand for justice.

Jesus demonstrated tough kindness, and I believe he calls us to do likewise – confronting injustice in the name of love. We need to get tough about our kindness. May God give us the courage to do so. Amen.