

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

July 1, 2018

Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer

Be God's kind of kind

—Galatians 5:22-23; Luke 6:35

Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

“Be kind.” It’s what you teach a child, what you say to correct a friend, it’s a reminder we all need from time to time. “Be kind.” But that simple command carries with it no power to make you or me or anyone else truly to be kind. *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* We have compared the fruit of the Spirit to a pie, a pie with nine slices. Of the nine slices, I think today’s slice of the day, kindness, may be the most difficult to define. How do we really define what kindness is? Maybe we don’t. Maybe kindness is just the kind of thing where we know it when we see it.

We certainly can see unkindness. Another word for it would be cruelty. We can see that. In Jesus’ famous parable of the kind Samaritan, the Samaritan wasn’t the only one in the parable. There were violent men who beat a traveler, a violation of God’s commandment not to murder, and then robbed the traveler, a violation of God’s commandment not to steal. How unkind of those men, to say the least! Jesus mentioned two other men: a priest and a Levite, two men who regularly worked at the house of God. They did not beat the traveler, nor did they rob him. But they were just as guilty of violating God’s commandments to help others in need and to protect what belongs to other people. They walked by the beaten, robbed traveler and did absolutely nothing to help him. They neglected the man lying there half dead. How unkind of the priest and the Levite! Yes, we know unkindness when we see it.

And we know kindness when we see it. Or do we? There is an intriguing Bible proverb that goes like this: “A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel” (Prov 12:10). All that passes for kindness on the outside is not necessarily true kindness within. There is a big difference between doing what the law says and actually fulfilling the law from the heart. Let me give you an example. I heard a woman talking about forgiveness. She was saying that when somebody hurts you and you don’t forgive, the only one who continues to hurt is you. You are hurting yourself and allowing that person to have power over you if you say you are not going to forgive. So in her view, it is important to forgive someone else for your own sake. When she forgives, she explained, it’s really a way for her to jab back at that person and say, “I’m not going to let you get to me.” Kindness? Hardly. Only our sinful human nature can take something like forgiveness, which should be one of the most kind and selfless acts there is, and turn it into a cruel and unkind retaliation. “The kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.”

What about you? You who tell your child to be kind, are you always kind to them? It is not kind to complain about your child in public and drag your child’s sins and failings before family and friends just so you can vent your frustration. You wouldn’t want that done to you. You who tell your friend to be kind, are you always kind to your friend? It is not kind to take advantage of your friendship and expect your friend to give you a pass and cut you some slack whenever you don’t feel like being kind in the first place. You wouldn’t want to be treated like that without an appropriate apology. You who tell everybody else just to be kind and display random acts of human kindness, do you? If your kindness is random, and you have to be reminded to be randomly kind, it seems legitimate to wonder if you are really kind at all. If you are not beating and robbing someone, there is someone in your life whom you are neglecting, even if you are not aware of it. If you are not guilty of gross negligence, some of your supposed kindness is still done with a grudging heart or a selfish tinge, even if you claim it isn’t.

But then finally we come to the ultimate test of kindness. The kind of kindness test that Jesus puts in front of us. Listen to Jesus in Luke chapter 6: “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.” “Be kind” has taken on a whole new complexion, has it not? From a benign command to just be nice to a damning indictment because we are not kind, not in the kind of way that God says we should be kind.

God is kind. As Jesus explains, God the Most High is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. He is kind to those who never say “Thank you” and to those who always say “I don’t want you.” One of God’s daily acts of kindness is sending sunshine upon the earth. Sunshine that grows the food, warms our skin, and brightens our mood. God sends the sunshine on everybody. He makes no distinction whether a human being will acknowledge that sunshine as coming from him or not. The late comedian George Carlin had a shtick about religion. George Carlin said that if he had to worship anything, he would worship the sun. Because unlike some other god, at least he can see the sun. Plus, he said, the sun never makes him feel unworthy, and the sun is always kind to him. That shtick of his

wasn't a joke. It had a lot of edge in it, and it was really a rage against God and the Bible. But God is kind. God kept sending the sunshine to George Carlin all 71 years of his earthly life.

God is kind. He was kind to the Israelites in the Bible's Old Testament. He redeemed them and brought them out of brutal slavery in Egypt, even though they would later whine and complain about how much better they had it back in Egypt compared to God's guiding them out in the desert. God gave them the promised land, even though they would use the rocks and trees and animals of the land to worship their idols rather than him. God gave them a king, even though their asking for a king was a rejection of him. How kind of him to do all these things for them. In the end, he even gave them his own Son, and we know what they did with him.

God is kind. He is so kind to us. He gives us life and breath, knowing full well how easily we take them for granted and even use them to sin. He puts dear people into our life—a parent, a spouse, a child, a friend—and runs the risk that we will end up loving that person more than we love him. He richly and daily provides us all we own, fully aware that our heart will try to serve money more than we serve him. He gives us periods of time, even though we are very good at wasting it. How kind of him to do all these things for us.

But then we come to the ultimate expression of God's kindness. The kind of kindness that exceeds all the rest of his kindnesses to us and the rest of humanity. You realize, don't you, that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? That the riches of his kindness, tolerance, and patience bring you to know your sin, confess it, and seek his forgiveness? At one time we too were foolish, but when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. We were dead in transgressions and sins, but God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. If you have experienced the Lord's anger, as your Redeemer he says, "I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you" (Is 54). He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving kindness" (Jer 31). God has drawn us to his Son Jesus, who died to remove our sin and rose from the dead to bring us everlasting life.

Wow! Has the Lord been kind to us! We know his kind of kindness. Being kind to us when we were his enemies, making us his friends. Being kind to us when we were ungrateful, making us thankful to him for time and for eternity. We live in his kindness and breathe it in every day. It never fails. His kindness is new every morning. Through God's words, God's Spirit reveals God's kindness to us. The Spirit deposits God's kind of kindness into our new hearts, so we are confident of God's forgiveness and his gracious favor toward us because of Jesus Christ. Then the Spirit draws God's kind of kindness out again, turning it into a fruit of the Spirit that comes out in our attitude and our behavior. Like the Samaritan in Jesus' parable, who went way out of his way to help, soothing the victim's wounds, bandaging him up, transporting him to an inn, and paying for his recovery out of his own pocket. We Christians have limitless opportunities to be kind and to show Christian kindness to each other, to our families, to our friends, and to our enemies. More than randomly. All the time.

Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Jesus even promises to reward our kindness. How kind of him to do that! And what greater reward can there be than simply to be called God's sons, God's daughters, children of God who act just like him?

So don't just be kind. Be God's kind of kind. It's a fruit of the Spirit that tastes good to you, tastes good to those around you, and tastes good to your God too. It's another fruit of the Spirit that comes from faith in Christ. And so we pray: "God, help us to be your kind of kind for Jesus's sake." Amen.