

Christ in Us

Part 6 – Dare to Be Kind

Galatians 5:19-26

Rev. Dr. Lorie Sprinkle ~ May 17, 2026 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another. (Gal. 5:19-26, NRSV)

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Prayer: Guide us, O God, by your Word and Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth, find freedom, and in your will, discover your peace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

A few years ago, we were visiting some family members, when one member, who holds rather different political viewpoints from my own, began talking about Donald Trump and the 2020 election. This family member did not deny that Donald Trump had lost the 2020 election. Nor did she deny that he had lied about it. What she said, however, was, “Donald Trump has a right to lie.”

At which point, I launched into a rather enthusiastic expose on how the Bible tells us that God abhors lies, that Satan is the prince of lies and that God will punish liars. She looked rather taken aback and our conversation came to an abrupt halt.

As I reflected on that conversation later, I realized that she was right. The First Amendment does not require that we tell the truth in the Public Square. But I was also right. The Bible does say that God abhors lies, that Satan is, actually, the father of lies and that liars will be punished, (thrown into the lake of fire at the Final

Judgment). So she was right. And I was right. But was I kind?

We are now on week six of the series on the Fruit of the Spirit. And the particular aspect of that fruit that we will look at today, is kindness. I want to remind us that the various aspects of the Fruit of the Spirit do not comprise some kind of check list, like I’ll do kindness on Tuesday, but I think I’ll put off generosity until Friday. No, these are all descriptive characteristics of Jesus. He embodied the entirety of the Fruit of the Spirit, and when the Spirit of Christ is at work in us, then what is true of him, over time, becomes true of us.

As kindness is smack in the middle of the attributes, I thought this would be a good time to step back a bit and look at the big picture of what was happening in Galatia and the context into which Paul wrote his letter.

Galatia, a region in present day central Turkey, was primarily a rural area with a few small urban centers. So the letter to the churches in Galatia did not go to a city like Rome or Ephesus or Corinth. Rather, it went to the churches in this large region with a diverse population, where farmers, then and now, worked hard to live off the land. So I think it’s safe to assume that these were independent, strong people.

Paul and his companions had traveled there, and walked the dusty roads proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. The people had embraced the gospel with enthusiasm, and numerous small churches had been formed.

But then, a group of folks called Judaizers had come up from Jerusalem and told the people that in order to be good Christians, they must first become good Jews. This meant that the men had to be circumcised. Some of the Galatians embraced this new teaching and it was causing chaos in the churches.

Remember, we’re talking about grown men here, in an age without anesthesia or sterile surgical instruments. So this was serious business. It was a mess. And it was causing all sorts of conflict and dissension in the churches.

You can imagine the arguments... “How can you be a Christian and not be circumcised?” “How can you be a Christian and allow yourself to be circumcised?”

So this was the context into which Paul wrote his letter. And given the current divisiveness and polarization within the church in America, this letter to the Galatians seems particularly pertinent. Especially with the religious overtones that infuse politics today. “How can you be a Christian and be a Democrat?” “How can you be a Christian and be a Republican?” So in the U.S., as in Galatia, God’s Word speaks to his people in the midst of conflict.

And I find that particularly informative when we’re talking about kindness. Because it’s easy to be kind when others are being kind to you. It’s a different story in the midst of strife. So what can we learn from the way Paul addresses this situation?

First of all, he does not minimize the conflict. And he is clear that those who have embraced the teachings of the Judaizers are wrong. “Who bewitched you?” He asks, “that you would abandon the teaching that you first heard.” “Have I wasted my time?”

Paul does not remain silent in the face of wrongdoing. But his heartache is evident. He cares deeply about these people. He remembers their kindness to him. He says, “You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?” (5:7) And he calls out the best in them - to return to the gospel they first embraced.

Paul reminds them that Jesus summed up the law by saying: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (5:14). Later, he contrasts the sinful nature with the Fruit of the Spirit. Both are manifested with internal attitudes that then drive external behaviors. So kindness, as well as the other characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit, is driven by a heart that is right with God and seeks the best for the other.

The Greek word that is often translated as “kindness,” *chrestotes*, comes from the root, *chrestos*, which meant literally, “fit for its intended purpose.” The ancient Greeks used it to describe things like healthy food, or orderly behavior; things that did what they were supposed to do. Eventually, that word evolved to mean moral excellence. So the purpose of *chrestotes*, (kindness), is to help us be the way we’re supposed to be.

That word in the New Testament is used primarily by Paul. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, “Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of his kindness (*chrestotetos*) and forbearance and

patience? Do you not realize that God’s kindness (*creston*) is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:3,4). So, kindness is an attribute of God that is intended to bring us to repentance. Later in Romans, Paul talks about the kindness and severity of God; not as opposing forces, but both intended to bring about change.

So kindness is not a sentimental feeling that turns a blind eye to what is wrong in the world. It does not smile and nod in the face of injustice in order to avoid conflict. And while it’s nice to be nice and avoid any ruffled feathers around us, there are times when kindness requires a hard conversation - speaking the truth in love. Because that’s how we call out the best in each other.

The closest word in Hebrew to *chrestotes*, is *hesed*. There is no English word that captures the depth and fullness of *hesed*. The most common translation is *lovingkindness*. This lovingkindness is expressed in the covenantal relationship between God and his people. It is God’s lovingkindness that hangs in there through thick and thin, and will not let his people go. It’s God’s lovingkindness that persists through Exodus and Exile, that is articulated in the Law and the Prophets and is culminated through the death and resurrection of God the Son.

The Psalmist sings of the richness of *hesed*. “Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.” (Ps 63:3)

Kindness is at the core of who God is. “...let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the LORD” (Jer 9:24). So again, we see kindness working in concert with justice and righteousness.

Kindness is an outward expression of the new life we have in Christ. “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Col 3:12).

So what does that look like? It’s all those things we say and do that encourage, support, uphold others and that bring out the best in them. Remember, the overarching theme is Jesus’ command to love our neighbor as ourselves. And when one of the hearers asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus launched into the story of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan – the foreigner, the reviled one, the enemy of the Jews. That person, Jesus said, is your neighbor. That makes kindness pretty tricky sometimes.

How are we to clothe ourselves with kindness in the midst of our polarized, divisive environment? For starters, we need to disrobe ourselves of those behaviors that are inherently unkind, even if they are common in today's world. So, with the intention of being kind in a sermon on kindness, here are a couple of things that are not acceptable for anyone, but especially Christ-followers to engage in.

It is not acceptable to call people names. That should seem self-evident, but it happens on a regular basis in the public arena. And we should not only not call people names, we should speak out against it when we hear it happen. Why? Because to call a person a name turns them into a caricature, it puts them in a box, which demeans their humanity. And as Christ followers, we affirm the full humanity of every person, regardless of who they are or what they have done. This does NOT mean that what they are doing is OK, nor does it mean that we agree with them. Rather, it recognizes that whoever it is, that person is created in God's image and is someone for whom Christ died.

Indeed, any kind of dismissive words or actions are not OK, even those subtle ones like rolling your eyes or making little "tt" sounds. Brene Brown a researcher and author who studies courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy says, "There is a line. It's etched from dignity. And raging, fearful people from the right and left are crossing it at unprecedented rates every single day. We must never tolerate dehumanization..."

"When we engage in dehumanizing rhetoric or promote dehumanizing images, we diminish our own humanity in the process... it says nothing at all about the people we're attacking. It does, however, say volumes about who we are and our integrity.

"...And if our faith asks us to find the face of God in everyone we meet, that should include the politicians, media, and strangers on Twitter with whom we most violently disagree. When we desecrate their divinity, we desecrate our own, and we betray our humanity."

Another common behavior in today's world is stonewalling or, "ghosting." And it is not acceptable, even though, again, it is commonplace. And it seems to me that, more often than not, people choose to cut someone off because it's easier to sever the relationship than to have a difficult conversation. Or they're not willing to do the long, hard work of resolving problems in the relationship.

But we, as Christ-followers are better than that. And we can be confident that Christ will give us the courage and the wisdom to have those difficult conversations and to work through those hard places. Because if the goal of kindness is to draw someone closer to God and

to bring out the best in them, then to not say what needs to be said isn't kind.

Paul had to confront Peter, who had gladly eaten and socialized with the Gentiles in Antioch. That was, until the Judaizers came and he bowed to peer pressure and cut off his relationships with them.

Paul writes, "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong." (Gal 2: 11)

Peter repented, and was restored to Paul and to the Gentile believers. So if even these two great pillars of the Early Church could be at odds, what makes us think that the same thing won't happen at times to us?

So when we are at odds with each other, the key is to be able to disagree while maintaining the relationship. After all, relationships involve rupture and repair. We will hurt each other's feelings at times. We will disappoint each other. That's a given. But what matters is that we stay connected and repair the rupture. That requires humility and wisdom.

When I think back to my conversation with the family member about Donald Trump having the right to lie, I realize it would have helped if I had let go of the need to be "right." To make sure that my opinion was heard. So what if, instead of launching into a rather vigorous Bible lesson, I had simply begun to ask some questions.

What if I took a deep breath and said, "Tell me more about the right to lie. If we have a constitutional right, does that give us a moral right? If you won't let your children lie, is it OK for adults to lie? And what about public, influential figures? What do you think that lies do to our social fabric? You know what the Bible says about lies, do you think that's important?"

In others words, what if, instead of coming down on her, I had come alongside her and we had thought together about the impact of lies, whether in our personal lives or in the public square.

That's hard to do, especially in the heat of the moment. But I also think it's closer to what Jesus would do if he were in that conversation. In fact, I know it is. Because the New Testament records Jesus asking over 300 questions. In fact, his primary way of engaging with people was to ask thought-provoking questions that allowed the person to think through their attitudes, words and actions. Jesus asked questions that opened the door to a deeper connection with him.

So, clothing ourselves in kindness requires both taking off those unkind behaviors that are so knee-jerk to many of us, and putting on behaviors that support and encourage others.

One thing I think would help us to be more kind is to simply pay attention. To put down our phones, to look up and look around and be aware of what's happening around us.

Is there someone who needs a word of encouragement? Is there someone who needs a hug? Is there someone who has a very practical need that I can help out with?

You see, being kind requires that we step outside of our own little world, and engage with the world around us with an open heart. And one of the greatest kindnesses we can offer to another is to be fully present to them. It's called *attuning*. We look them in the eye, we listen intently to what they are saying, they have our full undivided attention. And so they feel seen and heard and valued.

In Titus 3: 4,5 Paul says, "But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." As Jonathan Cruse notes in his commentary, that is incarnational language. When kindness and love appeared, God saved us.

It is striking that Paul equates kindness with God come to earth. So kindness shows us the very face of God - from a dirty stable in Bethlehem, to the shore of the Sea of Galilee, to all the many teachings and miracles, to a wooden cross on Golgatha, and to an empty tomb in a garden.

"When the kindness and love of God appeared... He saved us." Kindness, then, is at the very heart of God. And just as we love because God first loved us, so we are kind, because we have experienced the kindness of God. And on this Ascension Sunday, we remember Jesus ascending into heaven in order that the Holy Spirit could be poured out on his disciples on Pentecost. Because frankly, we can't do any of this by our own power. It is only the power of God the Spirit at work in us, both as individuals and as a community, that we can engage in kindness toward each other and to those around us.

Jeff has been giving us an exercise each week, and I didn't want you to be disappointed. So here's my suggestion. This afternoon and into this new week, simply pay attention to what is happening around you. Ask God to give you eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart that is open to the needs around you. And then to give you the wisdom and humility to be kind in whatever situations come your way.

It takes courage to be kind. But in this age of such anger, animosity and angst, we desperately need the sweet scent of kindness to blow through our homes, our schools, our work-places, our churches and our communities.

It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first call Christians (*Christiani*) in the first century. It wasn't long before that designation became commonplace. Then, in the third century, some people began to do a play on words, a pun, in regard to the Christ-followers - instead of calling them *Christiani*, they called them *Chrestiani* (from *chrestotes*). So those outside the church were literally calling them "the kindness people."

Imagine what it would be like, if we here at Faith had that reputation in our community - the "kindness people." What if, every time we showed up in our homes, our schools, our workplaces, our neighborhood, our community, people knew that kindness had appeared. And in that kindness, they could see the face of Christ in us. Amen.



The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read through Galatians, or watch the Bible project Youtube video to get an overview of the context of this letter from Paul. In what ways do you see Paul's courage demonstrated in confronting the crisis in the churches? How do you see him demonstrate kindness in calling out the best in the believers?
2. What is the difference between being nice and being kind? (Hint - it typically has to do with motivation). Can you think of a recent situation where you were nice, when you should have instead been kind?
3. We can be kind because we have received God's kindness. In what ways have you experienced the kindness of God?
4. We also learn to be kind through the kindness of others. What are some significant ways that you have experienced kindness through others? What have you learned from that?
5. From your observations, are there a couple of behaviors that are unkind, but also common? What are they, and why do you think they are damaging?
6. Brene Brown contends that dismissive behavior (including subtle ones like eye-rolling) diminishes our own humanity. Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. Recall a testy or difficult encounter you have had. Was there any other way you might have approached it?
8. The Greek word, *Chrestiani* (the kindness people), is a play on words from *Christiani* (Christians) that was

sometimes used to describe Christ-followers in the third century. Imagine what it might be like if your Life Group had the reputation for being “the kindness people.” What would that look like, and what steps might you take right now to move in that direction?

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Table to Table

A question for kids and adults to answer together

Take a moment to share your appreciation for a kindness shown to you by someone this week. Share some ideas of how you can demonstrate kindness to someone else this week.