

“UNUSAL KINDNESS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: II Samuel 9; Romans 2:4; Ephesians 4:30-32; Colossians 3:12-13

Character of kindness.

I generally make it a practice not to use Greek or Hebrew words in my sermons but there is a word in Hebrew that is so rich in meaning it's hard to translate into English and so a variety of words are used to try to capture the depth of this one word.

The Hebrew word is *hesed*.

It's the word in Micah 6:8, to do justice and love *hesed* and walk humbly with your God. It's the word in Psalm 23, surely goodness and *hesed* shall follow me all the days of my life. In Psalm 136 it says 26 times the steadfast *hesed* of the Lord endures forever.

Kindness, mercy, love, compassion. But it's deeper. It's covenant kindness, covenant love, the steadfast, unchangeable, unconditional loving kindness of God. God's love and kindness and mercy and goodness blend together in the *hesed* of God.

We are recipients of it even when life is hard, especially when life is hard.

Genesis 39:20-21 Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, ... 21 But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

God allows afflictions and hardship and heartache to show us how great His kindness is.

One of my favorite stories in the OT is a profound display of kindness. Recall the great friendship and love there was between David and King Saul's son Jonathan. When Saul tried to kill David, Jonathan intervened and made a covenant with David which included each other's descendants.

It was the custom of kings in those days when they rose to power to kill all the members of the previous king's family to secure their throne and dynasty. Years later, long after Saul and Jonathan were dead, one slow day in the palace David remembered his covenant with Jonathan.

II Samuel 9:1 And David said, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

David learned Jonathan had a crippled son who was living in hiding. David summoned Mephibosheth who must have come in fear and trembling, because David says to him,

II Samuel 9:7 Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always.

David treated Mephibosheth with covenant kindness, the same covenant kindness which God had shown to him. David was reflecting in human form the kind of kindness God shows us.

God looked down on earth as if to say, is there anyone I can show my covenant kindness to. What did God see? People estranged from Him, living as far away from Him as they could, people avoiding Him, neglecting Him, denying Him. He saw people limping, spiritually and morally crippled by a terrible fall. He did not find a single person worthy of His great kindness.

In a display of great loving kindness, God showed His kindness to those who didn't deserve it. He sought us out, He came to us, where we were, and He invited us to come to Him.

Kindness is that Christ-like, Spirit-enabled, others-oriented grace that helps and gives to someone in need.

Obstacles to kindness.

Our human nature is our biggest obstacle. The verses right before the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 are a pretty good definition of the unkindness of our flesh.

Galatians 5:20 enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions.

Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away.

Since kindness is so others oriented, one major obstacle to kindness is selfishness and self-sufficiency, self-reliance, independence. I can do this.

To ask for help or need help is considered failure, an admission of weakness and burdensome to others.

Of course, all of us as parents strive to give our kids wings, to help them be independent and make it on our own. The thirty-year-old living in his mother's basement playing video games is the stereotypic picture of failure to launch. Something is wrong with that picture.

We praise those who have made it, have arrived, who have pulled themselves up and made something of themselves, the self-made man.

As a result, we have a built-in aversion to asking for help and we look down on those who need it. Interesting that we will say we can't imagine life without our microwave or cell phone or car, but don't want to admit our dependence on another person.

Self-sufficiency cuts off the human interchange of giving and receiving kindness and love.

The truth is none of us are self-sufficient. We are all profoundly indebted to a complex network of millions of people, from the coffee bean grower in Central America to the electrical

engineers at Bonneville Dam to the fund managers on Wall Street. In fact, we are more dependent on others for our lives today than people were a hundred years ago.

Self-sufficiency is a lie, a false understanding, a form of pride and it is an obstacle to the grace of kindness, giving and receiving expressions of love and generosity and human decency.

Seeing my life and my job and my bank accounts and my insurance policies and my stuff and my strength as all mine, the work of my hands so I can be as independent as possible insulates me from needing anyone else or their kindness.

Cultivating kindness.

Cultivate kindness by knowing God and His covenant kindness.

Every week we gather here to acknowledge our dependence on God and how kind God has been to us. When we remember each week who God is and who we are before God and how desperately dependent we are on Him for everything, it humbles us and makes us more receptive to giving and receiving help from each other. What we have received we are to share.

Cultivate kindness by abiding in Christ.

Christ is the kindness of God incarnate, with skin on.

Abide in Christ because it is in Christ that God has shown you His great and immeasurable kindness. The more we know Christ the more we will know the kindness of God toward us.

Seek Him in prayer, in His Word, by the power of the Spirit, in personal and corporate worship.

Cultivate kindness by being aware of your place in the body of Christ.

Name one organ or part of our body that is self-sufficient or autonomous? The body of Christ image in the NT is a powerful one, meant to arrest our attention and get us thinking about each other in a different way.

Each of us a necessary part, each of us dependent on the other, each of us has a gift and each of us needs the gifts of others.

It is folly to think of one part being more important or more necessary than the other, or of some parts being independent of the others. The parts of the body are all necessary for the whole body. We belong to each other; we are members of one another.

God has purposefully created the church to function as a body, making each of us dependent on each other. We need each other.

Cultivate kindness by using your gifts, abilities and talents for others.

The Serve project has been a huge undertaking for our church. I am amazed at the large team of volunteers that are willing to serve the Serve team coming to serve in our community.

People have donated tools; people are helping on the work sites. I think we have just about all the host homes willing to offer a shower and a breakfast on their first morning here.

We still need about 20 people willing to pray for a student or two who is coming. You will be given a name and you will pray for them as they prepare to come and while they are here, for God's blessing on them, and using them, and bringing fruit from their life and into their life.

But cultivating kindness in this way extends well beyond Serve. Think about what God has given to you and how you can use it to edify and build up and bless the body of Christ here.

Consider your job, do you think of it as a means for getting a paycheck and securing a livelihood or could you begin to think of it as a means to help and serve others?

The jobs of others serve us, the cook and server at the restaurant, the manager and cashier at the retail store, the postman, manufacturers and deliverers. But do you see your work as service or just survival? Turn your work into hesed, service, and acknowledge the service of others.

Cultivate kindness by praying for it.

The hardest part of being a mom of five boys for Phama was their constant unkindness to each other. It grieved her spirit more than anything else in parenting, especially the heart of a person who is so kind and for whom kindness is so important. The most constant mantra of your home was "kind or quiet." The constant unkindness drove Phama to pleading prayer.

Well twenty years of praying that prayer over and over again has borne fruit. It took that long but we see the fruit of kindness in our sons today. And I can testify it is a miracle of grace and God's hesed. We didn't see it in the early years, we see it now.

Persevere in prayer. Don't despise the hard and challenging seasons when there is no fruit, it gives birth to prayers that God will answer later.

Cultivate kindness in your speech, let your words be kind.

Kind or quiet. Use words that build up, not tear down. Say thank you a lot. Give compliments. Speak forgiveness. Are there any kinder words ever spoken than, "I forgive you."

Of course, kindness isn't just sweetness and nice. Kindness can be in telling the truth, in giving an admonishment or confronting a sin. Kindness is concerned for the spiritual welfare of others.

Cultivate kindness in sacrificial generosity.

Start young. I experienced it at the parade yesterday sitting among several First Church families and a bunch of kids scrambling for candy. You know how precious candy is to a kid, but these kids actually shared their treasures with us adults sitting there. Dan even gave me his favorite candy bar. I'm telling you, stunning and staggering displays of kindness.

Acts 2:34-35 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Kindness is costly, it is love expressed in ways that make a difference. Remember the kindness of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35).

Especially consider how his kindness was blind to the racial and religious differences, blind to the bad blood between their peoples, blind to the inconvenience, cost, and circumstances.

Cultivate kindness by graciously and thankfully receiving kindness.

It is not a sign of your inadequacy or incompetence, it is not a negative indictment on you, receive it as a gift, as a kindness. Graciously accept help or assistance. Give them the blessing of giving.

Cultivate kindness by being others-oriented, thinking about others, by one "anothering" each other.

Sometime read the NT and notice all the over 60 "one another" passages.

Love one another, honor one another, accept one another, don't judge one another, forgive each other, bear with each other, be patient with each other, encourage one another, don't grumble or complain about each other, pray for each other, be kind and compassionate to one another.

Cultivate kindness by listening to one another.

In our increasingly disconnected world that is retreating into our screens, listening is a great kindness, an expression of love, a gift of time and of caring.

To rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep is the kindness of Christ. We need to be willing to listen to each other's problems, and we need to be willing to share our own with those willing to listen. Can we hear God if we won't hear each other?

If listening is a kindness, careful, attentive listening is a great kindness. It is putting them ahead of yourself, it is placing priority in them, it is dying to yourself for a moment.

The freedom of kindness.

Remember that story about Mephibosheth. It gets better. Mephibosheth lived in David's palace and his servants took care of him and his land. Years later the chief servant, Ziba, betrayed Mephibosheth and deceived David into thinking Mephibosheth had turned against him. So, David declared all he had given Mephibosheth be given to Ziba.

Sometime later the deception was uncovered and David decided to restore half of everything back to Mephibosheth. Ziba betrayed Mephibosheth and lied to the king, yet he still gets to keep half of what was Mephibosheth's. I have always felt it was unfair. I want to cry foul.

But do you know what Mephibosheth said to David?

II Samuel 19:28-30 ... you set your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right have I, then, to cry to the king?" ... 30 ... "Oh, let him [Ziba] take it all."

"It is enough that I dwell in the house of the king and eat at his table as a son. That is an immeasurable kindness, what more do I need?"

Would we say that if we lost our possessions even unfairly, if we lost our job, our health? Is it enough to be a recipient of the immeasurable kindness of God and to be welcomed in His house and at His table? Would we be that kind to someone so undeserving?

He was free to be kind because of the kindness he had received. The kindness of Christ to us sets us free to be kind to all.

Lord's Table and fruit.

Where in the Christian life do we see more clearly illustrated for us "the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" than at the table of our Lord?

Can you believe it? God has invited limping, crippled scoundrels like us to come into His palace, the church of Jesus Christ, and has invited us to eat at His table as sons and daughters.

It would have been enough just to let us in His city. It would have been enough just to let us eat in the servant's quarters like the Prodigal Son asked his father. But no, God killed the precious and only Lamb and invited us to eat at His table.

And God gives us an even greater kindness than David did for Mephibosheth. He ate at the same table with David's sons. God makes us sons who sit at His son's table.

I John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so, we are.

This is God's covenant promise, His hesed, to show the everlasting and "immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Kindness to sinful, undeserving people. Kindness to those who showed no kindness to Him. Kindness to those who stumble and fall and miss the mark and fall short of His glory. Kindness to those who are weak and foolish and neglectful and slow to learn.

The kindness of God for the people of God.

Father, fill us with your fullness, with your Spirit, with the increasing fruit of your life in us, make us more like Jesus. Thank you for the staggering immensity of your great kindness and goodness you have shown to us in Jesus. Enable us to show this kindness to others this week.