

Sunday, August 13, 2017

Spiritual Fruit of Kindness and Generosity

We continue in our summer series focusing on the fruit of the Spirit as Paul described in his letter to the Galatians 5:22-23. Paul is teaching the young church at Galatia about the acts of the flesh verses the fruit of the Spirit. Paul describes in verse 19-21 what he calls the acts of sinful nature also known as the works or sins of the flesh. These acts of the sinful nature are obvious and then he warns the people, if you live like this, you will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But those who will inherit the kingdom of God live by the Spirit. And the fruit of the Spirit is what Paul describes as the relational characteristics which lead us to grow. Two characteristics are Kindness and generosity and often we will use these words to describe people who are just 'nice'. But what do these words really mean as we look to have these characteristics for ourselves. We can be kind and generous—but to what extent are we to live this way? That is, how much kindness is needed and how generous do we have to be?

In Micah 6:8 the prophet asked the question "what does the Lord God require of us?" To do justice, and love kindness and to walk humbly with our God." Loving kindness here doesn't really help us to understand what it means to be kind. And it does not require individuals to be cruel to be kind either.

To be kind means "having or showing a tender, considerate and helping nature." Thus, one who is kind is friendly, generous, warm-hearted, sympathetic, considerate, gentle, affectionate and forbearing. Synonyms for kind include: philanthropic, benevolent, tender-hearted, compassionate, and gracious. In the Bible, Greek words are translated as being kind: CRESTOTE (Colossians 3:12) and PHILANTHROPIA (Acts 28:2). These words describe an attitude of heart that results in a specific character of action (Luke 6:35; Romans 2:4). It is because of a change in heart that individuals are kind. Being kind is an attribute of the new person in Christ. We become kind people because of the renewal of our minds or a new understanding that Jesus is our Saviour and we want to be like Him.

Kindness or being kind is not something that you just are. It must be demonstrated or practised. What counts is doing what you can, rather than saying what you would do. We read in I John 3:17-18 "My little children let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and truth" There isn't any kindness in the heart that says, "Be ye warmed and filled" but sends away the destitute with nothing (James 2:15-16).

Where is kindness found? It is found in the small acts we do sometimes unconsciously—holding a door open for a woman with a stroller; or a man with a walker, or a young person with bags. Kindness is also found when someone suggest doing something for someone else without counting the cost, without remuneration or even without thinking of oneself. It is a form of giving with caring attached.

Some of you might have heard about Random Acts of Kindness Day which is a day to celebrate and encourage random acts of kindness and the whole pay it forward mentality. Although this day has been celebrated since 1995 it is recognized on different days throughout the world—February 17 in US, September 1 in New Zealand and November 4 in Canada, but the purpose remains the same—share in kindness with others without looking for it to be reciprocated in any way. Do something nice for someone else for the sake of kindness. For some people this is difficult as we don't know what to do or say. Yet it doesn't take much to make someone's day—parking lot ticket—give it to someone who is just arriving if you ticket still has time on it; pay for someone else's coffee, buy lunch for a stranger.. Share of yourself in some way!

Our reading from Luke 10 is the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus was teaching and was asked what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus responded by asking, what does the Law say? The man answered- love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. And Love your neighbour as yourself.” But then Jesus was asked “Who is my neighbour?” In response Jesus tells the story of a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. While walking this route robbers attacked him, stealing his clothes, beating him and leaving him for dead along the road. He lay there even after a priest walked by who saw him and walked on by. A Levite also walked around the man on his way to Jericho and these people were known to be kind and caring people. They should have stopped but did not.

Instead as Jesus tells the story, it was a Samaritan who saw the man and took pity on him. This man bandaged his wounds, poured on oil and wine to help him become hydrated again. He then placed him on his donkey so that he ended up walking beside the donkey to Jericho. When he reached Jericho he took the man into an inn and took care of him. He did not leave him until the next day. As he had business to take care of, this Samaritan man took his own money and gave the innkeeper money to look after him and meet his needs. If he wants anything- I'll pay you back when I return. Jesus then asked those listening who do you think was a neighbour to the man who had fallen victim to robbery? They responded the one who had mercy upon him. And Jesus then states, “Go and do likewise.” Have mercy upon others. Be kind

to your neighbours help them when they need help. Don't count the cost and in all things be generous.

Are we a generous people today? In a world that revolves around economic issues—supply, demand, trade and investments, being generous today often involves a recognition, a great tax incentive and of course a name on a building or a site or a cause. What does it mean to be generous and does this generosity demand recognition? The Samaritan was first of all kind to the victim on the side of the road. He cleaned his wounds and wrapped him up. He put him on the donkey to ride into the town. He did not move too quickly and scare him but took his time. We don't know the origin of the victim but to the Samaritan it did not matter. He helped him anyway. He was generous with his effort because he took him to a hotel and looked after him right away. He had business in the community but did not attend to this but looked after the man first. Once they had both rested it was the next day that the Samaritan attended to what he went to Jericho to do and paid another man to look after the victim's needs. The innkeeper was paid to care for him and if further expenses were needed he would be repaid. It was the Samaritan man who was generous with his time, his money and with his care. And this man was a stranger to him.

How generous are you? How are you generous?

It is know that generous people often give more than they are asked to give. This could because they believe in the purpose of the cause and want the cause to be succeed. Generous people give out of their substance whether large or small, because it is the sacrifice that counts.

Like the Good Samaritan, generous people are known to give more than just their money- they give time, resources and skills.

Sometimes generous people give even when it doesn't make sense—why would a Samaritan help a random stranger? Why help the poor man on the street?

Generous people give to help others even when they differ from another person. This we have seen over and over again with the response to Syrian Refugees and even with the family the Presbytery sponsored over the last year. More than enough money was raised to help support one family so much so that the excess funds went to help other families through their sponsors,

People want to see the impossible become possible and so they give generously if they believe the cause is valid. Generous people give because they have been changed themselves and so want to pay it forward. How many gifts are given to others because someone helped them? Kindness and generosity often go together!

People even give out of their own poverty. There was a recent story of a young family who had given \$100 to the Red Cross to help recent victims of the BC Fires. This young family said they needed to help others and did so because they knew what losing their home to fire was all about—they had lived in Fort McMurray Alberta. This young family is just starting to be ok financially and rebuilding their lives.

Generous people will give when others will not. Yet we also know that the more generous you are and the more ways you are generous the richer you become!

Kindness and generosity. These characteristics are fruit of the Spirit Paul writes about but you must reflect on how and why you give of yourself in kindness. Paul also writes but in 2 Cor. 9: Whoever sows sparingly reaps sparingly. And whoever sows generously will also reap generously. But each person needs to give to others with joy—being cheerful. This is so that God's grace will abound to you and you will about in doing all things good in His name.

The fruit of the Spirit includes kindness and generosity. May God bless you with his grace as you give of yourselves in response to Christ's love for you.

PRAYER:

Holy God, we praise you for your teachings of the Spirit and how we may grow stronger and be more willing to share and have patience with others. Bless us O God as we seek to live by the fruit of your Spirit. Amen.

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