

August 31, 2019 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church

I hope we've done it, and that today we complete it, and there really is in our lives a strong case for kindness. Here's what we've explored so far in this series that ends today.

First we recognized that mean spiritedness, unkindness has its roots in an illusion we hold about ourselves and Jesus opens his sermon on the mount with a disillusioning reality. Blessed, happy, fortunate are the poor in spirit.

The thinking from which we must be disillusioned is the prideful illusion that we have something. Something to bring. Something to contribute. Some little offer of self-sufficiency. Jesus says NO! Blessed are those who are in touch with their spiritual bankruptcy.

This is foundational in building a case for kindness. This is foundational because when we live under the illusion that we, in and of ourselves, have something to bring, something to contribute to the justification of our entry into the kingdom of heaven that illusion will suck kindness from our souls. And our illusion of self-sufficiency will make us mean spirited towards those we judge as insufficient.

That's why Charles Spurgeon said, "Not what I have, but what I have not, is the first point of contact, between my soul and God." It is why Toplady wrote, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling."

When we can own that we don't have something to contribute, nothing to prove means nothing to lose, and with that thinking, that understanding, the chance of kindness increases.

To this first brick in the foundation of a case for kindness we next added being merciful. Maybe we best summarize the teaching on being merciful by simply reading William Barclay's suggested paraphrase:

The beatitude might read: O the bliss of the person who gets right inside other people, until they can see with their eyes, think with their thoughts, feel with their feelings, for the one who does that will find others do the same for them, and will know that that is what God in Jesus Christ has done.” The incarnation, God becoming human without losing divinity and the call of Christ for us to practice incarnational living and incarnational evangelism is for us to be merciful.

The third part of our foundation in a case for kindness is to be a peacemaker. In Ephesians Paul says that Jesus is our peace who has broken down every wall. In Colossians we are told that he has reconciled to the Father, all things in heaven and on earth.

And as followers of Jesus he invites us, the church, his body in the world to take up his work, to serve and lay down our lives for others. To be bridge builders and makers of peace.

Last week we considered the fourth part of the foundation in a case for kindness, we explored the upside down reality that blessed are those persecuted for righteousness. John Stott said, “Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value-systems.” Serving self or serving God.

Persecution isn't something we would seek but when we experience it doing right, there is validation that we are choosing serving God over serving self, as we are committed to the reality that doing the right thing is always the right thing. Sometimes it may be a challenge to determine the right thing, but doing it is always the right thing. Being kind is one of those “right things”.

In today's text we are called to proactive kindness. All of what we've talked about in this series has some relation to this last message. In the teaching of Jesus we are about to explore the bar is raised. The level of kindness called for in Jesus' words is one that is both inspiring and somewhat overwhelming in the expectation.

In our world right now today we see and experience, we hear and see on the news responses of unkindness. When one world leader insults, says unkind words about another world leader or the wife of a world leader, there is tit for tat. Unkind words fly back and for the benefit of no one.

When the wrong thing is done in our home, our school, our community, our state, nation, or world most often the response isn't kindness, not doing the right thing, but most often unkindness is met by escalating unkindness all the way from insult to war.

Even if we retrain ourselves. Even if we were disciplined enough to not hit back, to not respond to unkindness with further lack of kindness, while that might be some progress in human relations, reactive kindness is a low standard when compared to what Jesus calls us to in Matthew 7:12, one of the most widely known texts of scripture.

Barclay calls this text "The Everest of Ethics" the "Top most peak of social ethics."

Such simple words, such a short text, and yet what a grand declaration that these fifteen words in the original language could be so powerful that Jesus completes this verse by declaring that this short phrase is so dense in its meaning as to be a summary of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

It is an audacious claim that Jesus makes that he can, in just fifteen words, summarize all of scripture! All that the work of the scribes to make sure every teaching of scripture is accurately written and interpreted. All the laws all the teachings which the Pharisee's religiously committed to keeping, Jesus doesn't sweep away or reduce the significance but instead he captures all of that in one short phrase.

You may or may not be aware that there are Rabbinic parallels for almost everything that Jesus said in the Sermon the Mount. Nearly each teaching, each story, even the illustrations were one's familiar to

his listeners as being taught by the rabbis, and Jesus would simply extend or explain each in a new way. We hear this in practice as he taught saying, “You have heard that it was said...but I say unto you..”

But there is no real parallel to this saying. Here Jesus says something which had presumably never been said before. It was a new teaching, and a new view of life and of life’s obligation.

If we are serious about wanting to live and support a case for kindness, there is no better guide, no more accurate of a directive than these words of Jesus. “In everything, do for others what you would have them do to you.”

Similar sayings did exist but they all aligned on negative. They were about what we should refrain from doing. Good in their counsel. Positive in their effect.

Rabbi Hillel said, “What is hateful to yourself, do to no other.”

Tobit 4:16 says, “What thou thyself hatest, to no man do

Buddhist Hymn says, “Putting oneself in place of others, kill not nor cause to kill.”

Confucius, “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to othes.”

Isocrates to King Nicocles; “Do not do to others the things which make you angry, when you experience them at the hands of other people.”

Epictetus “What you avoid suffering yourselves, seek not to inflict upon others.

And the Stoics said, “What you do not wish to be done to you, do not do to anyone else.”

These teachings in the negative of what Jesus puts in the positive the proactive, the negative form can be satisfied by simple inaction. Just don’t do things and you are good to go.

But once again, as seems to be the habit of Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, he turns things upside down. He is not satisfied for us to just

not do stuff, it will not be sufficient for his body in the world today, not sufficient for us to only not do what we don't want done to us. The bar for followers of Jesus is way higher.

In *The Psychology of Christian Personality*, Ernest Ligon writes: "The positive formula of the Golden Rule involves a tremendous responsibility forcing us to be constantly considering our neighbor's welfare as well as our own, endeavoring to discover what we would like him to do for us if we were in his place, and then doing it."

As if we didn't already have enough to do! Our lives are full. Most of us aren't sure we can keep up with just taking care of ourselves and our families, and now it sounds like we have to be not just taking care of everyone around us, but taking care of them to a level of our personal preference were we to be in their shoes!

I'm telling you Jesus turns things upside down. We must adopt a new way of thinking. A counter cultural mind set. Jesus teaches that our anxiety should not be "How much are we to receive?" but instead our focus is to be redirected, "How much can we give?"

In our association with other people we must put ourselves in their place. Enter into their feelings. Know their difficulties. Understand their disappointments. Cheer their joys, and Share their sorrows. We are to so closely identify with them that we can then do to and for them, were our places to be exchanged with them, what we would wish them to do to and for us.

Listen to this quote from the book *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, "By all that you have known of the love of God, by all that you have received of the rich gifts of his grace above the most benighted and degraded person upon the earth are you in debt to that person to impart these gifts unto them." And its not just spiritual stuff. The quote continues.

"So also with the gifts and blessing s of this life. Whatver you may possess above your fellows places you in debt, to that degree, to all

who are less favored. Have we wealth, or even the comforts of life, then we are under the most solemn obligation to care for the suffering sick, the widow and the fatherless, EXACTLY as we would desire them to care for us were our condition and theirs to be reversed.”

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If you are like me this sounds good at first, noble, the right thing to do, almost inspiring, but then the enormity of the reality of the needs of our world quickly overwhelm.

When I quoted the statistics last week of 70 million refugees in our world, what can I do what can you do to make a dent in caring for 70 million refugees as I would want to be cared for were our places switched.

That's on a global scale. But what about the more than 2000 people on the streets or in the woods in Central Florida, while improvements have been made in the last 5 years still we have over 2000 homeless. And What can I do what can you do even about those 2000 so that we are caring for them how we would want to be cared for were our places switched.

In 2016 there were 60.9 opioid prescriptions written for every 100 people in Florida. Important pain management but obviously an abused substance with horrible ramifications for those addicted.

Nearly 180,000 people in Orange County live with food insecurity that means they have lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active healthy life. How would we want to be cared for if each night we weren't sure our child would have enough food to grow and develop and have an active and healthy life.

It doesn't take long to make us want to close our eyes and put our fingers in our ears because we can't fix the problems. We can't do for all what we would want done for us were our places switched.

There's just too many hungry, hurting, too many people in poverty and tonight on the news we will hear of another crisis and the bombardment of need may cause us to just shut down and slip to a level where we are satisfied to just not do to other what we don't want done to us. But that isn't Jesus ethic.

Andy Stanley was wrestling with the size of the need and how to help, how to practice Golden Rule living. And he read the text in Galatians 6:9 "So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time." Paul first says "Don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up." Doing the right thing is always the right thing!

Then Paul in the next verse gives us a how to with regards to this. Galatians 6:10 "Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters."

And from his reading and study of these scriptures Andy Stanley came up with a great suggestion. "Do for one what you wish you could do for everyone."

Reminds me of the man strolling along the beach and in the distance he catches sight of young woman who appears to be engaged in a ritual dance. She swoops down, then straightens to her full height, casting her arm out in an arc. As he gets closer he sees that the beach around her is littered with starfish, and she is throwing them one by one into the sea. He lightly mocks her: "There are stranded starfish as far as the eye can see, for miles up the beach. What difference can saving a few of them possibly make?" Smiling, she bends down and once more tosses a starfish out over the water, saying serenely, "It certainly makes a difference to this one."

Creating world peace is probably out of my scope of ability but I can forgive as I wish to be forgiven and two of the human family are more at peace.

I can't feed the world but I could get a meal for one hungry person.

I can't visit every funeral home and comfort every sorrowing person but I can be with one who is sad.

My efforts won't likely end poverty but I may be able to take that nauseating edge off of someone's life.

And I may never hold huge gospel sharing crusades like a Billy Graham, but I can share my story and invite one person to join me in following Jesus.

Luke was a freshman in high school, on the track and field team. It was a big race day. He had hoped to be one of the top finishers in the race. Mile two he was going all out. The race was going well. And then there was this huge straight stretch to the finish line and up ahead he sees this kid collapse to the ground. He tries to get back up but he can't. He collapses again. And something came up from within Luke. He said he knew he couldn't leave him. He said I had to get him. Luke helped this kid he didn't know up. He yelled at him to keep going. They'd go a few feet and he'd collapse. But Luke was determined to get this kid across the finish line. Each second of delay meant not placing in the race. But he knew that were their situations reversed this is what he'd want done for him. Kindness, practicing the golden rule turning two strangers into brothers. Luke caring for Jacob.

Undoubtedly there were others who collapsed. Luke couldn't assist everyone but he did for one what he wished he could do for all.

I want to invite you to golden rule living. Today at lunch in your conversation, maybe in the space you make for other to join the story, be kind as you would want to be treated were your places reversed.

I want you to work in a pattern of concentric circles. First to be kind with yourself. Talk to yourself like you would to some little child you were trying to positively coach.

Next is your family

Husbands and wives live golden ruled marriages.

Parents and children choose to be golden rule families.

Then your extended family your relatives,

Then your friends, be a golden rule friend.

Then your neighbors and work associates, be the best golden rule neighbor and work mate.

Then people you might call acquaintances, practice golden rule with those you meet.

And then if you have any extra opportunity, maybe just randomly practice golden rule living with total strangers.

Get intentional. Look for opportunities to do good. Wake up every day and see yourself as a gift to the world. Determine that you will be a contribution. Throw yourself into life as someone who makes a difference, who lives the golden rule, and makes the world a better and kinder place because you were here.

When we do this we are fulfilling our mission of loving people into a lifelong friendship with God. Golden rule living as an expression of kindness is loving people in a deep way as we each do for one what we wish we could do for all.

And when we do this we are making our vision to be a church without walls fully engaged in serving the people of our community, we are making that vision reality.

So please grow beyond being people who don't do to people what they don't want done to themselves. But lets think and be intentional with everyone we bump into to Do for others what we would want done for us were we in their shoes. And the world will be a kinder place because we've built a strong case for kindness.



How much illusion do you live with that you have something to contribute to your salvation?

What progress are you making on being able to really empathize with people in order to be merciful?

How did you work at being a peacemaker this week?

Where are you experiencing any persecution because you are clear, "Doing the right thing is always the right thing"?

What is the background of today's text (Read Matthew 7:7-12)?

Why is not doing what you don't want done to you easier than Jesus' "Golden Rule"?

Who is it hardest for you to think about doing to or for them what you would want done to or for you if your places reversed?

In what ways is Golden Rule Living fulfilling our mission of "Loving people into a lifelong friendship with God"?

How does Golden Rule kindness bring our vision to reality (A church without walls fully engaged in serving the people of our community)?



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