



*Be Imitators of God: be Kind*

August 8, 2021: Holy Eucharist Rite II for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment  
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

*May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, oh Lord. Our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

One of my most memorable experiences on vacation was at the Booth Bay Harbor Dump. This may sound odd.

I spent the better part of two days cleaning up the grounds around the cabin we have in Maine, which includes a shed full of stuff left there by the previous owners. I made five trips to the dump with our pick-up truck filled with old wood, lawn chairs, bags of string, ancient tools, pots and pans, milk bottles, spools of wire, tar paper, shingles, three lawnmowers, and cans of kerosene and gear oil.

At one point, I was at the woodpile, and an attendant came over to say, kindly, “That’s pressure treated, that goes in a different pile.” And then she proceeded to help me sort through which kinds of wood were which. And then she asked me if I liked my truck. And we had a conversation about pick-up trucks, and our favorites CDS.

On another trip, I asked the man working the cardboard crusher what they did with hazardous materials. He kindly stopped what he was doing and carefully explained how they handled those.

On the next trip, I had forgotten what the man at the cardboard crusher had said, and as I wandered around the vast stretch of asphalt with two bottles of kerosene in my hand, another attendant intercepted me and said, kindly, “Can I help you?” I asked, “Where do these go?” He said, “Here, let me show you.”

Be kind.

From the letter to the Ephesians this morning:

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you...be imitators of God.*

I looked up the Greek word that is translated this morning as “kind”—you’ll recall that the New Testament was written in Greek—and learned that “chrestos” is the Greek word.

I’m not a linguist, but from my study I found the word has a constellation of meanings: virtuous, good, benevolent, useful. It can refer to the activity or agency of someone—i.e. God, for example— in creating and upholding the universe.

The word in various forms appears a number of other times in the New Testament. For example, in the Gospel of Luke, (6.35) Jesus says, “God is kind to the just and unjust alike.” In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that “love is patient, love is kind” We are exhorted to be imitators of God—be kind. God has the kindness to create, uphold, and preserve the universe. We must have some of that ability, too, since we are created in the image of God.

But what does **kind** look like? Kind is not the same as nice. Kindness has guts. It has staying power. It persists when it the going gets tough. It heals and joins. Nice is....nice.

Here’s an example of kind. Psychologists John and Julie Gottman have studied marriage for decades. They argue that the amount of kindness in a marriage is the single most important predictor of a good and lasting union. The Gottmans say that partners are constantly making bids to one another. “Hey, look at that bird!” one may say. She’s not only interested in the bird; she’s interested in what her partner’s reaction to her interest is. This is called a *bid*. There are two possible responses to a bid—the partner can *turn away* by saying, “That’s nice dear,” and go back to reading the paper. Or the partner can *turn toward* and say, “Yes, that’s a beautiful bird; I love how you love birds.” This is kindness.

It may seem like a small thing—but over the days, months, years, decades, this positive turning *toward*, or turning *away*, either strengthens, or frays, the fabric of the relationship. Gottman’s research showed that in the couples that stayed happily married, 90% of the bids were accepted.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/06/happily-ever-after/372573/>

It’s the same with friendship, or any relationship, really. Kindness is like a muscle, and like any other muscle, it can be exercised. It must be exercised to grow strong, so that we can use it even when we are exhausted, or just don’t feel like it. Kindness is turning toward, rather than away.

It seems to me that the power of kindness is apparent not just among individuals or couples, but also intrapersonally, that is, how we treat ourselves.

Perhaps you were struck by the coverage of Simon Biles’ decision to withdraw from the gymnastics competition in the Olympics. You recall that she experienced a crippling mental condition that made it impossible to tell where she was in the air. She suffered massive criticism for this decision, initially, before public opinion rallied to her side. Biles expressed kindness to herself, let herself off the hook, gave herself a mental health day. This kindness allowed her not only to heal, but to make way for a new champion, to mentor her younger teammates, and to show the world that it’s ok to take care of yourself. Kindness is needed not only towards others, but towards ourselves. Perhaps some of you sometimes have trouble being kind to yourself. I know I do.



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Kindness may seem a small thing, in the face of wildfires, food insecurity, climate change, racial injustice, political gridlock and cultural violence. But it's not. It's a building block of love, the love God has for us, and wants us to have for ourselves and one another.

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you...be imitators of God.*

**Amen.**