

Friendly, deliberately doing good to others; from Middle English kinde, from Old English (ge)cynde "natural, native, innate." Wow, right?! This word is rooted in the belief that kindness is already in you—it's natural! For the rest of this week, we'll chew on kindness and trust the Spirit to help us live kind lives.

Tuesday

Today, begin by contemplating this wise saying from Proverbs 21:21:

Those who pursue righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honor.

The word *pursue* is an interesting notion. It speaks to our motivation. Kindness isn't a passive happenstance; instead, it is something that we seek. This Proverb speaks to our motivation and what we desire. The 'Golden Rule' of our faith (it is actually in all major faiths!) is to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Imagine if we actually lived by this rule!! It would be profound as we would seek after righteousness and kindness as we discover it being given in return. Humanity is always living in reciprocal relationship with each other. Any relationship that is one way is bound to fail and to injure.

Paul's letter to the Romans was a brilliant interplay of argumentation between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Each side sees their way as better than the other so Paul attempts to help them see that they aren't better than the other, that God's love is lavishly poured over both, and that they need to learn how to live in mutuality. In fact, this argumentation is still good for our day and

age! He invokes the Golden Rule by saying God's kindness leads us to the right path of mutual kindness.

So every single one of you who judge others is without any excuse. You condemn yourself when you judge another person because the one who is judging is doing the same things. We know that God's judgment agrees with the truth, and his judgment is against those who do these kinds of things. If you judge those who do these kinds of things while you do the same things yourself, think about this: Do you believe that you will escape God's judgment? Or do you have contempt for the riches of God's generosity, tolerance, and patience? Don't you realize that God's kindness is supposed to lead you to change your heart and life? Romans 2:1-4

Wednesday

Awakening to God is the journey of awakening to what is already here. This journey is the journey of learning to see anew, or in John's terms: to be born afresh. Spiritual awakening enables us to see every moment as a gift, each person as beloved, each sunrise and sunset as God's great painting. Spiritual awakening grants us the freedom to become our truest self and dwell in the richness of the present moment.

One of the gifts of the Psalms is they help us put language to our experience of awakening. Kindness is one of the attributes of God for out of God's kindness we are granted a life filled with wonder and awe. Today, read Psalm 145 and allow these words to sink deeply and become a

prayer for you as you awaken more fully to the God of grace and glory!

Thursday

Have you heard the phrase, "Talk is cheap"? It is the idiom that the movement of mouth is easier than the exercise of action. Kindness is this way too, isn't it? It means nothing without action! Ralph Waldo Emerson encourages us with these words—"You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late."

Faith is realized in our actions. The journey of faith unfolds by walking into the unknown with a radical trust that God is with us. Without actions, our faith is meaningless, at best, or dead, at worst. The Book of James profoundly challenges a heady faith by calling us to a faith marked by action. Read James 2:14-26.

In light of this passage, what are specific ways that you can exercise the gift of kindness today? I want to challenge you to write down specific actions you will take today to show kindness. Perhaps one person could be a family member; one a stranger; and one a neighbor or co-worker. Kindness only blossoms when we act out of our inherent nature to be kind! So go, bless the world today with your simple and profound acts of kindness!

Friday

One of the gifts of the 20th century theology came out of Latin America. Liberation Theology was realized as the church returned to our ancient story of God's deep concern and care for the marginalized, oppressed and the poor. The infamous

phrase that has come to define this movement is “God’s preferential option for the poor.” It is remarkable that we had lost this primary thread of our faith story but now we once more have the eyes to see it!

Proverb 14:31 says, “Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him.” Jesus also has much to say about the care and concern for those who are disadvantaged. Read Matthew 25:34-40. It is through our acts of grace, of kindness, that we live into God’s high calling.

These passages remind us that the way we live together matters! Whenever we trade this noble calling, to care for those for whom God weeps, for the false idols of power, prestige and profit, we are trading the way of faith, for the way of me-ism. One of the challenges is to ask the deeper questions of how we view the poor, oppressed and marginalized. Where have we contributed to oppressive systems, or completely ignored those crying out for help? How have we turned a blind eye to the one who is hungry or sick or lost? Our faith must inform our politics rather than our politics informing our faith. Too often we have created a false line between my faith and my politics. Instead, may our faith drive us to be a people that Embody Christ and ensure God’s preferential option for the poor!

Saturday

As we end our week focused on kindness, have you sensed a pull, desire and/or action to be a kinder person? I hope you can see that our faith is a faith that ought to make a tangible difference in our world, by the way

we live and act. Much competes for our attention, time and allegiance on a daily basis. God isn’t one who forces his way on us but instead awaits for us to be open to learning, growing and changing.

Kindness enacted will change others’ lives. Certainly we have heard stories of kindness shared and the life-changing impact it has had on another. It is when we receive God’s kindness for ourselves, and allow that seed to be planted deeply within and germinate, that we begin to more fully live as God’s people.

I don’t believe God is a kill-joy who has laws to prevent us from a good life. Instead, I believe the way of Christ is an easy yoke that allows us to live fully human lives. When the fruit of kindness is birthed, it creates the space where we can engage and embrace one another, not based on what they can do for us, but simply because they are God’s beloved...just like you are!

Today, may you reflect on Jesus’ high calling to “Love God and to love others.” How might that be true for all people in your life?



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A Fruitful Life – Part 5: Kindness

Devotional for the week of August 7, 2017

Monday

What do you imagine when you hear the word kindness? In a world filled with name calling, mudslinging, and scapegoating, I wonder how kindness works within us and through us? Too often it feels that we are in a drought of kindness as the elixir of controversy and catastrophe mire the news-feeds and numbs us to the vast ocean of kindness that happens every day all around us!

In the 4th Century, a leader of the church named Saint Basil painted a picture through words of the impact of our kind actions. He said, “A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love.”

One of our core beliefs as a Christian people is that we begin to mirror, or embody, the way of Christ. Our motivation is grounded in our faith and the Spirit stirring within us. Our actions are the truth-tellers of our beliefs. If you had to take an inventory of your last month of kindness, what examples point to this fruit? Is kindness a forced action or is it your prescribed response to others?

Kindness is a quality that we all appreciate in others. In fact, the etymology of the word kind is quite profound. Online Etymology Dictionary shares this-

