**Series: An Excellent Harvest**

**Sermon: Acts of Kindness**

As Ben showed us last week, whenever we’re working on a teaching God has a way of putting the issue before us. Ben experienced it with a school bus testing his patience. I experienced it as I was challenges to help a little boy.

I was out for a walk in the early evening the day before Halloween and I saw this boy on George and Priscilla’s porch trying to reach the doorbell button. It was too high for him so I asked if he wanted help. “*Yes please*”, he said, “*would you push the button for me?*”

I did then asked, “*Is there anything else I can do for you?*” He answered, “Yeah, *now you can run and hide with me!*” So much for my act of kindness. I tripped the kid as we ran away.

The fruit of the Spirit is kindness. It seems like kindness as part of Christian character should go without saying. Often it does. Most Christians I know are in fact very kind people and don’t need a sermon about kindness. Then I see someone I know is a believer do something rather unkind and I’m reminded that kindness isn’t natural.

Someone who did a large scale study of school bullies reported that most people who bully do it because they enjoy it. Human nature can be very cruel and sadistic. That comes naturally. Kindness has to be learned.

The fruit of the Spirit is kindness is not to say that one can only be kind if he has the Holy Spirit. But kindness is part of God’s excellent harvest.

We all know what kindness is but we’d probably all struggle to write a definition. It’s much easier to show examples and aspects of kindness than to define kindness.

The Biblical concept of kindness begins with the Hebrew word “tov”. “Tov” literally means to bow your head in courteous respect and evolved to mean to treat someone properly and appropriately.

How you respond to a dignitary for example? I’ve had the privilege of meeting three Indiana Governors. I played basketball with Evan Bayh one time. I didn’t call him Evan. That’s just not proper. I called him “*Sir*” or “*Governor”*.

“Tov” is to be proper and appropriate, especially in relation to people. But what is proper and appropriate in every context? That’s where we have to use our creative ability. We can learn a lot from the way the word “kindness” is used.

“Tov” sometimes describes something that is useful, desirable, pleasing, and even good.

“Tov” was used in the creation account in Genesis 2. Verse 7 says, *The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

But then in verse 18 He added, *It is not* ***good*** *for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.* “*Not good*”, that‘s “tov” negated. Something’s not right. It’s not appropriate.

After God created the helper suitable for him Adam was “tov, appropriate and proper. To be appropriate and proper is kindness.

In Genesis 40 is the story of Joseph, the guy with the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. He was falsely accused of a crime and tossed into prison. There he interpreted the dream of the king’s wine taster who was also in prison.

He asked the man, *When all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison.* Genesis 40:14 *When you get out, treat me appropriately. Do this little thing for me*. There’s an aspect of sympathy in kindness. Sympathy is proper and appropriate.

Another aspect of kindness is benevolence. Before David was king of Israel his best friend was Jonathan, the son of King Saul. After both Saul and Jonathan were killed and David became king he discovered that Jonathan had a son, Mephibosheth.

David sought him out and found that he was crippled in both feet. He invited Mephibosheth to his home saying, *I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan.* 2 Samuel 9:7

David provided materially, food and housing for this man. Certainly there was an element of inconvenience, still it was a generous and kind way to treat him. And it was proper and appropriate.

Jeremiah 24:2 reveals yet a different aspect of kindness referring to a basket of “very good” figs. “Tov” includes “top quality”. In Daniel 2 “tov” refers to “*pure*” gold.

Everything about “tov” is good, it’s best, it’s pure, it’s right, it’s proper and appropriate.

Kindness may be defined as acting in a way that is good and proper and appropriate, especially in how we treat people, including sympathy, benevolence, and generosity.

In the New Testament the word translated “kindness” in our recitation of the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 is χρηστος chrestos, which is very similar χριστος Christos. Sometimes Christians who were committed to Christ were mistaken to be committed to kindness. That’s not a bad mistake.

Luke used Χρηστος to describe God’s love. *Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.* Luke 6:35

God loves His enemies. He does good to them even knowing that they won’t respond positively. Kindness means, to treat people properly and appropriately even if they don’t deserve it.

In Romans 2:4 Paul used “kindness” in an interesting context. *God’s kindness leads you toward repentance. Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness?* Instead of immediately responding to punish our sin, God in kindness gives us time to repent. Kindness gives people a break.

My daughter Bethany and her husband Levi landscape their yard with plants that produce food. They are now using some special trees. A fruit bearing stem has been grafted onto a dwarf root ball. They should produce fruit but the trees will be small enough for them to tend them from the ground.

In Romans 11 Paul used that metaphor showing another aspect of kindness. Jesus had said that He is the vine and we are branches. Paul picked up on that and wrote that we who are sinners, through our faith in Christ are grafted into the vine and draw life from it.

With that image in mind he wrote, *Consider the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.* Romans 11:22 Kindness means to provide a way for us to be blessed. That’s proper and appropriate.

In a letter to Titus Paul wrote*,*

*At one time we were foolish, disobedient, deceived and*

*enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,*

*He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.* Titus 3:3-6

When we were anything but worthy of God’s grace, rather than hurt us, in “kindness” He showed us mercy, generously filling us with His Holy Spirit so that we could be saved. Kindness means to show mercy.

Paul also used χρηστος in Ephesians 4:32 when he wrote, *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Sometimes we want to strike out but that wouldn’t be proper and appropriate. Kindness means to forgive.

Do you remember this from Jesus? *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* Matthew 11:28-30

The word “easy” is χρηστος which is usually translated “kindness”. *My yoke is kind*. Instead of loading us down with a burden of more religion and guilt, what Jesus offers is kindness. Jesus takes our burdens and treats us properly and appropriately. Kindness means to gently and humbly lift burdens of others.

The Fruit of the Spirit is kindness. It’s part of the nature of God but not of man so we have to work at it. What good is knowing kindness if we’re not doing kindness? Like most of the Fruit of the Spirit kindness is something we put on, *as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* Colossians 3:12

Before you came to church, you thought about what you are going to wear and you put your clothes on. You didn’t wait for the clothes to wrap around you. In the same way, put on kindness.

Recognize that you’ll need the Holy Spirit for this because sometimes you won’t feel like being kind; you won’t like some people you encounter; you will hate some situations that call for kindness. Still, with some of your own effort and the power of the Holy Spirit you can behave properly and appropriately. Kindness is an act.

Kindness shouldn’t be something extraordinary but unfortunately so many people are unkind that when you do some kind deed it stands out.

You will make yourself a kind person by being kind. I know that sounds like “duh”, but I mean that by practicing kindness you turn yourself into a person who thinks kindness first.

Kindness is evidence of spiritual maturity. Peter wrote, *Rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is kindness.* 1 Peter 2:1-3

Based on experiencing the Lord’s kindness, we stop all of our unkind behaviors. In that we show that we are growing up in the Lord.

Paul taught that kindness is also an indicator of credibility as a servant of God.

*We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness.* 2 Corinthians 6:3-6

Even in troubling or irritating circumstances he says he lived the Fruit of the Spirit including kindness. We too establish credibility when we’re kind even during trying or uncomfortable or exacerbating times.

Instead of excusing ourselves because we’re “under so much stress”, our kindness or unkindness will show our true hearts.

\*Tony Campolo is a sociologist, minister, author, and professor at Eastern University in Pennsylvania. He is one of the more interesting characters I’ve ever read.

He told of one day while walking to his office as he passed the usual cadre of homeless one lady holding a cup of coffee offered a sip to him. Tony gave her a glance and kept walking. After a bit he stopped, turned around, returned to the woman and said, “*Hey lady. Yes, yes I would like a taste of your coffee*.”

She held the cup out to him, he took it and swallowed some of what he said is the most delicious cup of coffee he had in a long time. “*Isn’t it good*,” she asked. “*Yes, it is very good! And thank you. By the way, why did you offer me your coffee?*”

“*Because it was so good, I thought someone might like to share it with me and enjoy it too*.”

It was a small gesture but that simple act of kindness that interrupted Tony Campolo’s walk to his office reminded him that kindness comes in all shapes and sizes.

\*Somerset Maugham, best known for his novel Of Human Bondage, was born to an extraordinarily beautiful woman and an extraordinarily ugly man. Someone once asked his mother, “*How does such a beautiful woman marry such an ugly man?*” She replied, “*He has never once hurt my feelings*.”

\*Mamie Adams went to the post office in her town often and to buy stamps. Once around Christmas time she found a rather long line. A clerk realized that she merely wanted stamps and pointed out that she could buy stamps from the machine in the lobby. “*I know*” she said, “*but the machine won’t ask about my arthritis*.” Apparently the postal clerks in that office show Mamie kindness.

\*George worked at a hospital and was well loved by everyone. When he was in the hospital himself suffering from a fatal illness, the administrator of the hospital visited him when his children were with him, so also did one of the janitors.

Afterward one of his children said, “*Dad, do you realize you treated the president of this hospital and the janitor with the same kindness?*” George chuckled and asked, “*If both the janitor and president left for two weeks, which one do you think would be missed the most?*”

\*A policeman Mark Taylor pulled Randy Murphy over for a minor traffic violation. Murphy did not have a driver’s license. Officer Taylor asked why he had no license to which Murphy answered that he couldn’t read and thus couldn’t pass the written test. Mark Taylor proceeded to teach Murphy how to read for several months and then went with him to the license examiner and helped him read the test so he could get his driver’s license.

\*Elvis Summers made friends with a homeless woman and then on his own built a tiny house that could exist on the street in their town so she had a place to live. Since that first house he has now built over $80K worth of tiny houses for homeless people.

\*Desiree Andrews has downs syndrome. She was also a cheerleader at Lincoln Middle School in Kenosha, WI. She didn’t have much of a sense of rhythm and some spectators began to make fun of her. Miles Rodriguez, Chase Vazquez, and Scooter Terrien, all 8th grade players on the Lincoln basketball team walked off the court to stop the rude taunting.

\*A high school basketball player’s mother died unexpectedly on a game day. He came to the game and the coach allowed him to sit on the bench, but he wanted to play. Since he had arrived late and was not listed on the roster in the official score book it would be a technical foul if he entered the game, still the coach put him in.

The other team, knowing the situation refused to shoot the technical free throws. The officials persisted saying they had to shoot. So the captain of the team shot and badly missed both free throws.

Do you get the point? Kindness comes in all shapes and sizes. People want and like being treated kindly even if we can’t define it.

You know how to be kind I don’t need to tell you. If you don’t, Google “*Acts of kindness*” and you’ll find pages and pages of ideas. Let me just say this, think about how you react to and treat people. Treat them properly and appropriately and people will see this Fruit of the Spirit in you.

Let’s end this with another story of kindness.

A older couple came to a third-class hotel in Philadelphia late one night and pleaded with the clerk, “*Mister, please don’t tell us you have no room. My wife and I have been travelling and didn’t know there was a big convention in town. We’re tired and need to rest.*”

The clerk looked them over and said, “*You can have my room tonight. I work all night and sleep during the day*.”

The wife simply said, “*God bless you young man*.”

The next morning they asked the clerk why a good man works in such a seedy hotel and then asked if he wouldn’t like to work in a beautiful luxury hotel. “*It sounds wonderful*,” the clerk responded.

The man was John Jacob Astor. He then built the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and invited the clerk to work there.