

***Time for Kindness?***  
Called to be Fruit Bearers – V  
October 16, 2016

**Call to Worship:**

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.<sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

Galatians 5:22-24 (ESV)

**Scripture Reading:**

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”<sup>26</sup> “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”<sup>27</sup> He 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 neighbor as yourself.’”<sup>28</sup> “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.<sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.<sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.<sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.<sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’<sup>36</sup> “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

This morning marks the halfway point in our series on the *Fruit of the Spirit*. The fruit that we find in the middle of the basket are just as important as the fruit we find on the outside – those at the beginning and at the end of the list we find in Galatians 5:22-23. At a quick glance they look quite similar, but there are differences.

The *Fruit of the Spirit* is like a tapestry, an artwork made up of different designs and colors woven together. Often, from a distance, some of the colors look similar, but up close you notice the differences. The same is true of the *Fruit of the Spirit*, they actually bleed into one another, sometimes it’s hard to tell the one from the other. It’s especially true of the three fruit towards the middle – last week’s on patience, this week’s on kindness and next week’s on goodness. They are very important fruit – minimized today by our English language. They really have to do with our eternal destiny.

The fruit which Alex did a wonderful job of looking at last week, *patience*, is mostly about God being patient with us sinners, not wanting any of us to perish but to come to repentance and to have eternal life. The real meaning of the biblical concept of patience is probably best captured in 2 Peter 3:9:

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

It is probably no coincidence that the fruit that we are looking at this morning, kindness, comes after the biblical fruit of patience. In our English language, at least as most of us understand it today, kindness is a nice idea – “be kind to one another.” But in the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek they are much bigger, very important, rather encompassing words. In the Old Testament Hebrew, the word that we translate into kindness in English is one of the great Hebrew words found in Scripture – *hesed*. In its fullest context it encompasses God’s kindness to human beings expressed in salvation. Other words are often used with it – like, “loving kindness,” “unfailing kindness,” “everlasting kindness.”

In 2 Samuel 22:51 it says, *God shows **unfailing kindness** to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever.*

In Isaiah 54:7-8 God speaking to his people through the prophet:

*“For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with **deep compassion** I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with **everlasting kindness** I will have **compassion** on you,” says the LORD your Redeemer. Isaiah 54:7-8 (NIV)*

When we get to the New Testament, the word used for kindness in Greek, in its fullest meaning, still expresses God’s salvation for His people:

*When we pass judgment on other people, “we show contempt for the riches of his [God’s] **kindness**, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance.” Romans 2:4 (NIV)*

*Consider therefore 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 (NIV)*

*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. Titus 3:4-5 (NIV)*

Very often in the Bible kindness is connected with compassion and mercy. God speaking to Moses in Exodus 33:19 says, *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion*, a verse which Paul reminds us of in his letter to the Romans. And in Colossians 3:12 Paul writes, *Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with **compassion**, **kindness**, humility, gentleness and patience*. In the biblical languages kindness, compassion and mercy are intrinsically connected. You really can’t separate one from the other two.

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan is really a story of kindness and compassion. Those that you would have expected to stop and help the man, the religious – a priest and a Levite – for whatever reason did not. And they probably had some pretty good reasons. Probably the biggest reason was fear. Throughout much of its history, in fact almost all the way up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a very dangerous road to travel. It was very common for robbers to be hiding along the way. It was also not uncommon to set people up – to stage what looked like someone needed help and when the people would come and help, they would rob and assault them. So, fear would have been a genuine concern. Hence the priest and the Levite walked to the other side.

Then there is the fact of our own selfishness that often gets in the way of seeing people who are in need. In Jesus' parable it says that the Samaritan "saw" the man who was in need and took pity on him, he had compassion for him. One of the other things that often prevents us from taking notice of people in need is the busyness of our lives.

Many years ago Princeton Theological Seminary conducted a rather interesting study on this parable of the Good Samaritan. They had their seminarians, many who were studying to be pastors, prepare a presentation on the parable of the Good Samaritan, kind of a mini sermon. They were then assigned to go and give their presentation at different buildings throughout the campus. Some had more time to get to their destination than others. The researchers used the paths between the buildings as their own version of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Along the different paths they placed a shabbily dressed person slumped over with his eyes closed, coughing and groaning. They wanted to know if the seminarians, those who had just prepared a presentation on the parable of the Good Samaritan would stop and help. What they discovered was that most would not! A few almost stepped right over the man, many others went to the other side. Some did stop and inquired if they could help. The most interesting thing about the study, there was only one factor that showed a statistical difference and that was how much time the student had to get to where he or she was giving their presentation. Those who had very little time, some even told they were already late, were significantly less likely to offer aid than those who were not so rushed.

That study was conducted some forty years ago. How much more true in our busy lives today, something that Alex alluded to last week when he talked about the average person's attention span today being approx. eight seconds. Thirty to forty years ago it was widely believed that with all the advancements in technology our lives would slow down, that the average work week would probably be even less than 40 hours, that people would have more down time, more time to take notice of things. The exact opposite has occurred, and then so exponentially.

One of the things I usually do on a daily basis is I try and catch up on the news, usually on the internet. I check the national news (USA Today), then I do some more local (Columbus Dispatch, WHIO, Bellefontaine Examiner and WPKO). And if I have time I usually check the headlines of the Buffalo News since we lived there for so long and we still have many connections. And a week or so ago one of the headlines caught my attention.

It was about a State Trooper who had stopped someone for speeding. The reason it caught my attention was that he was out of the same station that I spent most of my 20 years with the New York State Police working out of. And the road that he caught the person speeding on is one that I am very familiar with. I myself caught many people speeding on that same road. It was one of those roads which was like catching fish out of a goldfish bowl. It's a residential area with a low speed limit and lots of traffic at different times of the day.

Not that we ever had a quota but if you needed some extra tickets and it was getting near the end of the month, that was one of the places where you went and sat ☺. But the story was not just about the Trooper writing the speeding ticket, it was a story about what can happen when we get so focused on doing what we usually do that we don't see people in real need.

As the Trooper was at the driver's door window asking the man for his license and registration another vehicle went by. It got a short distance ahead and for some unknown reason the car just drifted off the right side of the road and ended up against a utility pole. The driver of the car said to the Trooper "did you see that," which the Trooper acknowledged that he did. He heard it too. The Trooper said "I need your registration, license and proof of insurance." After the man gave the information to him he asked the Trooper, "are you going to check on him," for which the Trooper responded, "yes when I get done with you." The Trooper then went back to the vehicle, ran all the required information to make sure it was valid, took the time to write out the speeding ticket, for which the driver said seemed like forever, came back to the car, took the time to carefully explain the ticket and his options in court. All the while other vehicles are going by, seeing the vehicle off the road against the pole, but not stopping because seeing the police car with its lights on nearby thinking help has already arrived. After getting the ticket the driver again says, "are you going to check on the driver of that car?" Finally, the Trooper does and what he discovers is that the middle age driver suffered some type of medical emergency and whatever help he might have been able to provide him was too late. The man was already deceased. The State Police's response, "the Trooper was doing what he was supposed to be doing." Sometimes, doing what we are supposed to be doing prevents us from offering kindness and compassion to those who are in need. Back in the day, might I have done the same thing as that Trooper? Yes, I might have very well done the same thing. Would I today? I would like to think not.

Being kind and compassionate is a choice. It is about taking the time to look around and see those who are really in need. There are people in need, of many different things, in every community and most people choose to look the other way, figuratively we walk to the other side. We're too busy, we don't want to get involved, it's messy, we might get taken advantage of, we might be viewed as weak and not standing by God's word. I don't know if you noticed, but there is one attribute missing from the list of spiritual fruit in Gal. 5:22-23 and that is the attribute of "rightness." The problem is we get so wrapped up in trying to be "right," while God is wrapped up in trying to be loving, kind, merciful, compassionate and forgiving.

While "righteousness" is important, we are made "righteous" only by what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. But we're commanded by God in the Bible to "be kind and compassionate to one another, and to forgive just as in Christ God forgave us" (Ephesians 4:32).

Kindness involves action. Kindness is compassion in action. The good Samaritan not only had compassion for the injured traveler, he decided to do everything he could do to help the man. He befriended him, he bandaged his wounds, and he took him to a place where he could rest and heal, and even paid for his lodging out of his own pocket. Compassion without action is worthless, much the same way as the disciple James tells us “faith without works is dead.”

Yes, kindness is a personal decision, but like the other fruit of the Spirit, it grows and is nourished only when we are connected to the Vine. As we are now halfway through this series, titled “Called to Be Fruitbearers,” we probably need to pause once again and remind ourselves where we get this fruit from and who is ultimately responsible for growing the fruit –

*“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”* John 15:5

Jesus intends for his followers to do good things, namely to bear good fruit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The title of my message is “Time for Kindness?” There are really two parts to that question this morning: 1) Do we have time for kindness in our lives or are we just too busy?; and 2) Is it time for kindness in our country? Just look at the Presidential election – loving kindness is the furthest thing from either side – their thoughts, words or actions.

I was following along in the Scripture reading schedule this week and I came across these words of Jesus which made me pause:

*“Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.”* Matthew 12:25 (NIV)

Jesus seems to be pretty clear about that. When we focus on that which divides us instead of that which unites us – no matter how powerful the entity might have once been, or how big, or how rich, it will not stand. Throughout history kingdoms as powerful and as big and as rich as the United States of America have existed before (at least relatively speaking) and have fallen into ruins.

And then I thought, “you know what, sometimes we’re not really that different in the church.” Often it seems that we focus more on that which divides us than that which unites us, and when we do that we’re in trouble.

When we do that those nine *Fruit of the Spirit* just seem to rot and fall off the vine. We as believers in Jesus, the body of Christ otherwise known as the church, are called to something different. We’re called to a kingdom that cannot be shaken, a kingdom that is not exemplified by the fruit of the flesh – hatred, anger, violence, sexual immorality, sensuality, greed, discord, selfish ambitions, dissensions and factions, but to a kingdom exemplified by the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. “Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28). We are called to focus our attention on God and what He has done for us through our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ.