

Sermon: Fruits of the Spirit sermon Series: Kindness- July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019

A few years ago, before the invention of viral trends, something began to happen which garnered international attention. It started with one person, Juan Mann, standing at a busy pedestrian intersection with a sign that read, "Free Hugs," on both sides. I have preached on Juan before, but in his own words he describes the important of his action which led to something much bigger than himself, "I'd been living in London when my world turned upside down and I'd had to come home. By the time my plane landed back in Sydney, all I had left was a carry-on bag full of clothes and a world of troubles. No one to welcome me back, no place to call home. I was a tourist in my hometown.

Standing there in the arrival's terminal, watching other passengers meeting their waiting friends and family, with open arms and smiling faces, hugging and laughing together, I wanted someone out there to be waiting for me. To be happy to see me. To smile at me. To hug me. So, I got some cardboard and a marker and made a sign. I found the busiest pedestrian intersection in the city and held that sign aloft, with the words "Free Hugs" on both sides.

This kind gesture, formed out of his own need, turned into an entire movement and eventually began an international campaign of people coming

together with the intent of being present at as many busy places as they could with one intention and one intention alone, simply to offer hugs to people that might need them. Equally as interesting around the same time as that group of people offering free hugs was forming up, another news story appeared, this time about a Tim Hortons drive thru and how one morning when one person went to pay for what they had ordered, they asked, much to the drive thru attendants shock to pay for the order of the people behind them; there was no reason for this, they didn't know them, nor did they know what they had ordered, it was simply someone wanting to share a kind gesture.

What began as a kind gesture early in the morning turned into an entire day of people buying the coffee and baked goods for the vehicle behind them; which I must say is actually incredible if you really think about it. At any point one of those folks could have simply said, "Oh great, I got a free coffee today, what luck!" and carry on, but no one did. Each person upon hearing that the vehicle in front of them had paid for theirs, they choose to pay for the vehicle behind.

Those are two well known cases of what we call random acts of kindness, but the reality is in an age when there truly appears to be nothing good at all in the news or on social media, everyday, there are an untold number of not so

random acts of kindness that make a difference in peoples lives. A simple smile to someone who is sitting alone, holding the door open at the post office, offering a cup of coffee to a friend who needs to talk, actually being willing to spend some time and listen for the answer to the question, “How are you today?” Seeing in someone that they are hurting and asking if they need a hug. Telling someone how lovely their new haircut looks. Congratulating people when they have achieved a dream, these are such small acts, small ways to influence another’s life, but they make all the difference in the world.

And why it makes a difference in the world is because of what kind acts, random or not, do in the hearts, minds and souls of those who experience them. When I have spoken with groups or individuals about how it feels when someone is kind to you the responses are always similar. What I often hear from people are that when they receive kindness their whole outlook changes. Some have described a warmth in the core of their being or a sense of overwhelming worth, value and innate sense of belonging. Another expression that has always resonated with me is when folks say it’s a like a dark cloud lifting and a beautiful summer day coming upon their soul.

Now whether or not you would agree with those words to describe how it feels to receive kind words or actions, what I do not believe anyone of us can disagree with, is that kindness breeds kindness. The hug campaign and the Tim Hortons drive through event are great examples of this, but it doesn't always have to be that big. For example, more often than not, if you hold a door open for someone, that person in turn will hold a door open for another. If you smile at a stranger and say good morning, that person is more likely to smile and greet the next person they meet.

If you take the time to be present with someone who just needs someone there, that person is more likely to be perceptive of the needs of others in the days that follow. Which ultimately is how, kindness informs our faith. As a fruit of the Spirit to be kind, literally means that we share the grace and love of God with others, and that grace and love, regardless if others define it as being from God or not, thrives, multiplies and blossoms all around us.

Which is why our reading today from the Gospel of Luke is incredibly important. Though it does not seem to be about kindness, ultimately it is. Jesus is approached in our reading today by someone who almost begs of him to tell his brother to fairly divide the family inheritance. Jesus' response is to ask who made

him the judge. Which I love, because Jesus is defining in that moment what his purpose is, not to judge, but to teach. And if we learn from Jesus to live by the fruits of the spirit then there is no need to judge. I think that's important to note and is incredibly powerful in our lives.

So, Jesus does, what he does best which is to teach, he begins by saying, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." And then he tells a parable about a rich fool, who has an abundance of land which has produced beyond measure. More than he could ever possibly need; and his response to that abundance is to demolish his barns that full to the rafters and build bigger barns to hold the produce and the result of this plan is that he is happy and merry and joy filled with all that he has. But Jesus points out that man's life could end that night and what difference would all the stores of produce give him, the answer is nothing.

When it comes to the fruits of the Spirit, that we have been exploring over the last four weeks, our final one today that of Kindness is the cornerstone. It is, I would like to suggest, the fruit of Spirit that is the umbrella for the rest. What I mean by that is that kindness is the one expression of a faithful life that encompasses and in fact encourages all the other fruits of the spirit (humility,

compassion, patience and gentle strength) and our reading today doesn't seem to match that conclusion, at first glance. However, you may have noted over the last couple of weeks is that all of our fruits of the Spirit call us, and in fact encourage us into relationship, not just with God, but with one another.

To describe the importance of living out what Jesus teaches, namely the fruits of the Spirit outlined by St. Paul, Jesus gives us a snap shot of a life not lived in that way. Effectively he showcases the difference living in kindness can make, by pointing out the opposite of kindness which is greed and self preservation; and Jesus' point seems to be what does that give you? In the long run to be greedy to hoard wealth or whatever else, to preserve your self interests, what does it give you? Nothing. It does not build relationships, it does live into the Kingdom of God, it does offer any grace what so ever; it gives you nothing other than a perceived, and incorrectly inflated sense of self worth.

Kindness is the opposite of that. kindness showcases a sense of another's worth. To act kindly towards people, shows them that they have value in your eyes, that they have meaning and purpose. To fill someone with that warmth, to listen when they need an ear, offers them and us and different answer to Jesus question about what does it give you? And the answer is that it gives a sense of

purpose, a sense of belonging and a feeling of being valued and worthy of love; kindness literally is the saving grace of God.

Which is why Kindness is the last of the fruits of the spirit I wanted to talk about. Because though I believe that humility is important, and though I believe compassion is important, and though I think patience is important and though I think gentle strength is important; to be kind to another, requires of you the ability to be humble to see everyone on a level plan. To be kind requires of you to be compassionate, to see another's need and want to help alleviate it; to be a neighbour. To be kind means that you will lead with patience and gentle strength, to lead with the ability to take the time to hear God's will in your life and to have the internal strength to act. When we are kind, we are all of these fruits of the Spirit at the same time, and as I already, said when we are kind; kindness breeds kindness.

Now there will be some that will say, well yes, but some people are just mean, there is no getting through to them, there is no sense in wasting your time on people or situations like that, and my response would be to say, you missing the point. Not that long ago I was standing in line at the IGA with my son waiting to pay from the few things I had. The cashier was dealing with a particularly

tough customer; this person was being so mean to her and everyone else. Even with a number of us asking the person to calm down and to not treat the cashier so terribly their bad mood and bad behaviour continued. When the transaction was over the cashier stepped out of her spot behind the till and proceeded to lift all of these persons bags back into their cart for them; something she most certainly did not have to do, but the mean-spirited person could not lift the bags and so the cashier kindly help; she then called someone else to come and help them unload the bags into this persons car.

As we walked out of the store and were talking about what had happened, I could see my son pondering something and he then said, "It was incredible how kind she was to that person who was so mean to her, I will need to remember that." Right there the lesson was learned. Because all of us in line that day learned how to be kind, from a cashier who deserved not to kind, but who was kind nonetheless. That kindness may have been lost of the person that it was shared with, but it most certainly blossomed in everyone else.

That is what the fruits of the Spirit do, when we live in the Fruits of the Sprit, when we are kind, thus humble, compassionate, patient and gently strong, we see everyone as worthy, we see everyone as a child of God, we see the grace

and love of God blossom and grow in us and those around us; and that my friends is what faith is all about; it is a belief in the power of love beyond us moving in us and the world and through us that love can be seen every day. And thanks be to God for that. Amen.