

Sermon 8-2-20 — Love is Kind
Central Church
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This is week three of our sermon series entitled 'Love Is'. We have been looking at Paul's description of God's unconditional, agape love. An unconditional love that we are to exhibit toward others. Paul describes what this love is like in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 13. There, in the fourth verse, we read:

Love is patient, love is kind. — 1 Cor. 13:4

Last week, we learned from Paul that if we are to love others as Christ loves us, we must be patient. We discussed some practical ways to develop more patience, and then asked you to practice loving patiently. So, how did it go? Was your patience tested by anyone this past week? If that happened, did you try pausing to breathe, pray, and remember how patient God is with you? Did it help? Were you able to respond with patience? I hope so because before love can be practical, it must first be patient. Moreover, when we are able to love patiently, it can serve as a tremendous witness to those around us. As Jesus said in John:

I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. - John 13:34-35

Of course, agape love is more than just patience. This week, Paul reminds us that agape love is also being kind. But what does Paul mean by kind? Kindness can mean so many things. It can mean being nice, or gentle, or helpful. Perhaps a better way to get at what the Bible means by kindness would be to ask what loving kindness looks like. Let me share an example from the Bible and see if it helps us to understand what Paul means when he describes love as kind. If you have your Bible handy, turn to 2 Samuel chapter 9. It is a story from the life of David, in which David, contrary to all expectations, demonstrated loving kindness.

As 2 Samuel chapter 9 opened, David had been the king of Israel for many years. He had won countless victories. He had established himself on the throne. At long last, he had room in his life to deal with less urgent, but still important, matters. One matter David needed to care for was a promise he had made to his friend Jonathan. Remembering that promise, David asked:

"Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" — 2 Samuel 9:1

In order to understand David's question, you first need to know a bit of his back story. Saul was the first king of Israel. At first Saul was a good and godly king, but with time, he drifted away from his original calling. Jonathan was one of Saul's sons. As son of the king, Jonathan was heir to the throne. And yet, somewhat surprisingly, he befriended David. David was one of the least of Saul's subjects, a young shepherd, too young to serve in the king's army. However, David came into prominence after he defeated the giant Goliath. Saul invited him to join him at court and, in time, David and the king's son, Jonathan, became best friends.

It is surprising that the son of the king and a shepherd would become friends, but it was even more surprising that they remained friends, especially after David fell out of favor with the king. As David grew more and more popular, King Saul began to see David as a threat to his throne. In fairness to King Saul, God had declared that David would one day be king. Which meant that, even if David was not a threat to Saul's rule, he was a threat to the future reign of Saul's family. David, by nature of the prophecy was a threat to both Jonathan and his family.

Which made David and Jonathan unlikely friends. Logically, they should have been enemies. Think about it. Jonathan's father, the king, both feared and despised David. Worse, the prophet Samuel had promised David the crown which Jonathan had been raised to believe would one day be his. Jonathan and David were political rivals, contenders for the same throne. They should have gotten along like: Democrats and Republicans in a presidential election year, like the Yankees and the Red Sox, like **WSU and UW at the Apple Cup**.

However, instead of seeing David as a threat and rival, Jonathan became David's most ardent supporter. He even helped David escape the wrath of his father. Before David left, Jonathan asked a favor of him. In 1 Samuel 20:13-15 we read: **13 "May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father. 14 But show me unfailing kindness like the Lord's kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, 15 and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth." — 1: Samuel 20:13-15**

Jonathan had reason for making this request. He knew David was destined to be the next king. He also knew that the custom, in those days, was that when a new king assumed the throne, they would have the family members of the old king executed. They did this to ensure that the prior king's family could not lead a

revolt. In essence, Jonathan was saying, "David, I know you're going to be the next king, but when you do, don't kill me. And please spare the lives of my family."

As the story unfolds, Saul (along with all his sons) was killed in battle by the Philistines, which led to David becoming king of Israel. Once he was declared king, David wasted no time consolidating the kingdom and securing his throne. It was only later, when things had finally settled, that he recalled the promise he had made to Jonathan, which led him to ask the question we read earlier. David asked, "Is anyone in Saul's family still alive—anyone to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" One of his servants, a man named Ziba, replied "Yes, one of Jonathan's sons is still alive. He is crippled in both feet." - 2 Samuel 9:3

Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, was not born crippled. At the time when his grandfather and father were killed in battle, he was a healthy five year old playing in the palace back in Israel. However, when news reached the palace that the king and all of his sons had been killed, the palace staff feared that the palace would fall and everyone would be killed. Mephibosheth's nurse, trying to save her young charge, grabbed him. As she hurried out of the palace, dropped the young boy, crippling him. Fearing for his life, the nurse took her young charge into hiding. It seemed the right thing to do. After all, if tradition and logic were any guide, David would soon secure his throne by having Jonathan's son killed.

But that was not what David did. David had made a promise. So he asked,
4 "Where is he?" Ziba answered, "He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar." 5 So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel. – 2 Samuel 9:4-5

Notice the name of the place where Jonathan's son was hiding. It was called "Lo Debar". Lo means "no" and Debar means "pasture." Mephibosheth was hiding in a desolate wasteland, a place with no pasture, no vegetation. That was where he had been covering in exile for at least fifteen years, a cripple, living in fear for his life. Can you imagine how he must have felt when a group of soldiers showed up at his door, summoning him to see the king? The king had at last found him. The dire predictions his nurse had warned him of were about to become real.

Put yourself in Mephibosheth's shoes when he was led into the presence of King David. His father Jonathan had been killed. All his brothers had been killed. He

had grown up hiding in the desert in fear for his life. And now he was standing in the presence of King David, himself. This was the king who had killed a lion with his bare hands, who had killed Goliath, who had killed thousands in battle. He knew that his grandfather had tried to have David killed. He knew that political custom and wisdom decreed he would die. His nurse had been telling him from the time he was five that he needed to hide lest David find him and kill him. Now he stood, between two guards, facing his death, waiting for David to hand down his sentence.

But listen to what David said. **“Don’t be afraid!” David said. “I intend to show kindness to you because of my promise to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all the property that once belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will eat here with me at the king’s table!” — 2 Samuel 9:7**

Did you hear that? Despite what tradition and wisdom advised, David promised to show kindness. The Hebrew word that is translated kindness is ‘cheched’. It is used 127 times in the Psalms and is most often translated loving kindness. It is often used to describe God’s love, but not God’s love in general. Cheched refers specifically to God’s covenantal love for his people. It’s a love that never gives up, never gives out, never ceases, is given unconditionally, even to those who do not deserve it.

It is the love David sang of in Psalm 8:

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens... When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? - Psalm 8:1-4

David understood what it was like to feel unworthy and undeserving of God’s favor. He no doubt thought, what was the kindness he was offering Mephibosheth in comparison to all God had done for him? And so, when Mephibosheth expressed his unworthiness, that he had done nothing to deserve such favor, David promised him that not only would all of his grandfather Saul’s property be returned to him, but from that day forward he would be a guest at the king’s own table.

What a life-changing moment that must have been. Mephibosheth went from ‘Lo Debar’ (no pasture, wasteland) to having everything that belonged to King Saul. He went from hiding in the wilderness to dining at the king’s table. He went from

being an unwanted cripple, afraid of everyone, to being treated as one of the king's sons.

So, there we have it, the story of David's kindness. But what does it have to say to us? What can we learn from it? The first thing that I want us to note is that Mephibosheth had absolutely nothing to offer David in return for his kindness. What could an unwanted cripple, hiding in Lo Debar, have to offer the king of all of Israel? David showed kindness to him expecting nothing in return.

That is important, because if anything is clearly commanded throughout the Bible, it is that God's people are to show compassion and kindness to those who are the least, those who have little chance of ever repaying their kindness. Indeed, Jesus' last parable in Matthew was about this very thing. Jesus asked his followers to feed the hungry, to give drink to the stranger, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick and those in prison, and then pointed out that "Whatever we do for one of the least of these, we do it for him." – Matthew 25:40

We need to understand that the world's economy is very different from God's economy. When I was in business, I was advised to always be on the lookout for networking opportunities, especially with those who might enhance my future business opportunities. That is how the world works. I scratch your back and you scratch mine. Right?

But God's economy is very different. God calls us to show kindness to those who are broken, crippled, the least, who can offer us little or nothing in return, much as we have little to offer in return for God's love. That is what David did when he reached out in kindness to Mephibosheth. Logically, Mephibosheth had little to offer. Logically, David should have had him put to death, but instead David offered him a place at his table; made him one of his own sons.

Why would David do that? After all, Mephibosheth's family had not been kind to David. His grandfather, Saul had tried to kill David. It made no sense for David to show kindness to Mephibosheth. That said, David was aware of something very important. David could not forget that he had been the recipient of the undeserved, loving kindness of God. Moreover, he knew that the only way he could repay God's kindness was by showing loving kindness to others, especially those who did not deserve it.

In reaching out to Mephibosheth, David was simply repaying the loving kindness that God had shown to him. It is the loving kindness that David later spoke of in the Psalms where David described God's love as kind.

Like David, we too have been recipients of God's loving kindness. Like David, we too are called to show that same loving kindness to those around us, especially those who do not deserve our love. Moreover, because such love is so unexpected, it can be one of the most powerful forces we in the church have for change in the world.

Which is why one of my frustrations with the contemporary church is that we seem to have lost sight of God's call to be kind. Instead, we emphasize being strong. Our gut reaction is to fight those who oppose us. We often label as soft those who refuse to stand up and fight for their faith, even as we pick fights with those whose views differ from our own. Perhaps, that is why most non-Christians view the church as a force of anger and conflict rather than a force for loving kindness.

Bullhorns and fist shaking, harsh legislation and angry Facebook posts, have done little to win over a culture that sees little use for God or the church. Perhaps it is time to try another way. David's way, Paul's way of reaching out with charity and loving kindness to those who don't deserve it, to those who are unlikely to repay us, even to those who disagree with us.

This does not mean that we don't stand for the truth. It simply means that we trust God to break down barriers, not with political weapons and harsh words of argument, but with loving kindness. I cannot recall a single time when someone changed my views by berating or belittling me. But my world view has been rocked by those who unexpectedly showed loving kindness. The ideals of kindness are rooted in Scripture, founded on Christian theology, and tested over the millennia by followers of Jesus. Since the early church, disciples have walked the risky and sometimes dangerous road of kindness. Maybe the time has come for us to walk that road, too. So, what I would like you to try this week, is to let God defend himself and instead show loving kindness to all, but especially to those who neither expect or deserve it.

What scripture are we to memorize this week? You won't be surprised to learn that we will be adding to our passage from last week as our understanding of love grows. Our passage is **"Love is patient, love is kind." — 1 Cor. 13:4**

Repeat it morning and night. Pray over it. Let it shape the way you live and the way you love.