

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

August 13, 2006

Ephesians 4:31-5:1

Violence in our world has dominated the news lately. The death toll continues to rise in the Middle East as Israel and Hezbollah battle. Both military and civilian casualties escalate in Iraq and Afghanistan. Airlines are at an increased level of alert after some two dozen people are arrested in a plot to blow up several aircraft heading to the United States from Europe. The city of Indianapolis, IN, is on edge. There have been 13 murders in the last 7 days. Incidents of child abuse and domestic violence are on the rise. Domestic violence includes murder, kidnapping, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and the like, where the victim to offender relationship is based on marriage, family ties, a romantic relationship. In some counties in the United States, juveniles charged with domestic violence now make up 80 percent of kids held in detention.

As school begins, teachers and administrators are vigilant, eyes and ears open in an effort to prevent violence. You just wonder how long it will be before we read of a student who will bring a gun to school or a Columbine-like plot is discovered. Random acts of violence plague our nation and world.

Pam and I were in Dothan a couple of weeks ago, and were listening to the news on the radio, hearing about a murder that had occurred in Dothan. And about that time, I noticed a bumper sticker on the car in front of me. It read "*Practice random acts of kindness.*" I had seen the slogan before, and so have you. The full the phrase reads, "PRACTICE RANDOM

ACTS OF KINDNESS AND SENSELESS ACTS OF BEAUTY.” And I thought, in a world where there seems to be more random acts of violence than kindness, that is good advice.

I’ve learned that the phrase was first coined in 1982 by a journalist named Anne Herbert from Sausalito, California. She was sitting in a restaurant one day when the words just popped into her head. She jotted them down on a paper placemat. Later she wrote about the concept in her newspaper article, and now you’ve probably seen the phrase everywhere – on bumper stickers, billboards and T-shirts. If you Google it, there are numerous web sites devoted to the concept, and even an elementary school curriculum has been developed to teach the spreading of kindness throughout the world. “Practice Random Acts of Kindness and Senseless Acts of Beauty.”

What does it mean? Simply this: EXPECTING NOTHING IN RETURN, HELP OTHERS AROUND YOU, BE KIND AND THOUGHTFUL, AND MAKE THIS WORLD A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE BY BEING A LOVING PERSON. Startle people with gracious acts of generosity. Wouldn't it be great if this concept would really catch on and become a way of life? Wouldn't it be great if you and I and people all around us were practicing “*random acts of kindness?*”

When's the last time you asked the person behind you at the supermarket checkout with only a few items, if they'd like to go ahead of you; or praised your fellow workers; or smiled and waved when someone let you pull in line when there was a string of traffic. When's the last time you phoned or sent a letter to a friend that you haven't been in touch with for a while; or picked up litter when you were out for your evening walk, or took food to a lonely person for dinner, or wrote to the company of an employee who was particularly

helpful? I had a woman in one of my churches who would sometimes include a cheerful thank-you note in her bills when she paid them. She says, *“The people who open the bills and process them need encouragement because they usually get nothing but grief and complaints.”* At a time in history when our headlines are filled with stories of war, violence and inhumanity, in a day when respect has gone out the window and rudeness rules the day, isn't it time for us to begin to practice kindness?

But when you think about it, that's not really a new suggestion at all. Two thousand years ago, Jesus came, showing us how to be kind and gracious and generous and thoughtful and loving. Think about the Sermon on the Mount or Jesus' parables. Think about His life – the way He treated people. His message was loving-kindness!

And following the teaching of Jesus, the apostle Paul championed the cause of kindness. In his letter to the Galatian Churches, Paul said that when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, we will be loving, joyful, faithful, kind people. And to the Ephesians, he wrote these powerful words that sum it all up: *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger and harsh words. . . Instead be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”*

In the verses preceding these from our scripture lesson, Paul had been talking about ethics and morality, and how we as Christians should relate to other people; then he sums it all up in one sentence when in effect he says, *“Treat others as Jesus Christ has treated you.”* If you want to be one of His disciples, then in the Spirit of Christ, be kind, be tenderhearted, and be forgiving. Let's take a closer look at Paul's outline.

First of all, BE KIND. One night Larry King was interviewing Barbra Streisand on his television program. He read a quote from another performer and asked her to comment on it. The other singer said, *"I owe the public nothing but a good performance. I don't owe them an autograph, I don't owe them my time, or even a smile. All I owe them is a good performance when I walk on stage."*

Streisand replied, *"No, I don't agree with that at all. Absolutely not! Because there is love and kindness and respect."* And then she added, *"Every human being owes every other human being the gift of kindness."*

I don't agree with everything Barbra Streisand says or does, but she was right about that! God made us to live in COMMUNITY. God made us to live in RELATIONSHIPS. God made us to live as HIS FAMILY, as his children, and the GLUE that holds us together is the GLUE OF CHRISTLIKE KINDNESS. Be kind to one another! Practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty. Jesus taught us that a long time ago. The apostle Paul knew it. But the question is, do we know it? Do we know the power of kindness? Just think of it: What would happen if every one of us performed just one act of kindness each day this week? What would it do to our schools? What would it do to our workplace? What would it do to our home life?

SECOND, Paul reminds us to be TENDERHEARTED. To be tenderhearted means to be loving and merciful and compassionate.

My brother is a Principal in a Middle School in Indiana. A couple of years ago, they had a thirteen-year-old boy bring a gun to school. When the police asked him why he carried it, he said, *"Because if I carry a gun, then I'm gonna get respect."* Where did he get that

idea? He got it from our society, which saturates us with messages that equate violence with honor and respect. Movie after movie, TV show after TV show, revere violence. But that is wrong – that is mixed up – that is distorted!

Mark Trotter, a United Methodist pastor and author of many books put it like this: *“Two thousand years ago Jesus said we ought to move beyond this Stone Age mentality, this trying to get even all the time. We ought to stop this cycle of violence and hatred . . . and show the world a better way.”* The *“better way”* is the way of love and mercy and compassion. We have to find a way to stop the violence in our time and get back to the spirit of Christ, the spirit of tenderheartedness.

Did you hear the story about Michelangelo who had a huge chunk of marble delivered to his studio? The man who brought the marble from the quarry asked Michelangelo what he intended to sculpt, and he replied that he intended to make a statue of an angel.

Later the quarryman returned to Michelangelo’s studio and marveled at his work. The quarryman asked, *“How did you ever carve such a marvelous likeness of an angel from that rugged piece of stone?”* And Michelangelo replied, *“I just chipped away everything that didn’t look like an angel.”*

We each have some things in our lives right now THAT DON'T LOOK LIKE LOVE and TENDERHEARTEDNESS. But with God's help, we can chip them away! If we have anything in our life that doesn't look like COMPASSION, or MERCY, or CARING, with God's help, and for the other person's sake as well as our own, let's get rid of it! Let's let God chip away everything that doesn't look like tenderheartedness.

And finally, Paul says, BE FORGIVING. Guide Post magazine had a story of an older man who had a beautiful spirit of forgiveness. He was an inspiration to everyone who knew him. Let me share a little bit of his story with you.

“Many years ago, when I was a youth, I got into serious trouble. I was scared to death. I didn’t know what to do. I went to my parents to tell them about my problem. I thought they might kick me out of the house, but to the contrary, they loved me more than ever. They listened to me. They hugged me. They cried with me. They supported me. They helped me through that difficult situation. And they forgave me! And I made a vow then and there, to be a forgiving person like they are. Because of them and what they did for me, I have dedicated my life to the spirit of forgiveness!”

As Christians, that is our calling. We have been forgiven so much by Christ. HOW COULD WE NOT BE FORGIVING? How could we not keep that spirit of forgiveness alive? If you ever wonder, “Should I forgive that person who has hurt me?” – just remember Jesus hanging on the cross and saying, “Father forgive them.” That’s the measuring stick for forgiveness.

Practice Random Acts of Kindness – isn’t that what Jesus did? Isn’t that what we should all do? Paul encouraged the Church at Ephesus, and he admonishes us through this scripture lesson today, to be KIND, to be TENDERHEARTED, to be FORGIVING in the Spirit of Christ our Lord — as a tribute to Him. Kindness is so Christlike – it’s the Christian thing to do.