

## FRUIT NO. 5: KINDNESS (Luke 10:25-37)

2.17.19

### INTRODUCTION

In the late fall of 1963, a mother of three young children got the devastating news that her policeman husband had been killed by a guy who was a suspect in a murder investigation. Her entire world was obviously turned upside down. However, in the midst of that overwhelming pain and darkness, a sliver of light arrived in the form of a sympathy note she received in the mail concerning her husband's recent death. It read:

*“What can I say to you — my husband’s death is responsible for you losing your husband. Wasn’t one life enough to take on that day? . . . I lit a flame . . . at Arlington that will burn forever. I consider that it burns for your husband too and so will everyone who ever sees it. With my inexpressible sympathy, Jacqueline Kennedy.”*

Nearly 50 years after that horrifically tragic day, that woman, Marie Tippet, the wife of police officer J.D. Tippet, who was killed trying to talk with an agitated young man that the world would soon learn was named Lee Harvey Oswald, recalled that amazing moment of kindness from someone to whom she was a complete stranger — and who was simultaneously having to deal with her own private grief plus the grief of her children plus the grief of an entire nation. Yet she took the time to express that kindness to someone whose grief she recognized. Fifty years later, Mrs. Tippet could still feel the comfort from Mrs. Kennedy's words: “That’s the thing you always want, that somebody can just understand how you feel — and she did. She recognized that I was suffering too, and isn’t that wonderful? That we had a First Lady who was so caring for everyone.” What a lasting impact a moment of kindness can make!

This morning that’s the “fruit of the Spirit” we will be looking at: kindness. And we have an equally amazing story that hopefully captures the idea of what that fruit is all about.

### TEXT: LUKE 10:25-37

***On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”***

An “expert in the law,” or a lawyer, was a reference to a scribe. Many of the scribes of Jesus’ day were also Pharisees.

“Test” in the Greek means to put to the test, to challenge; Jesus was often confronted with scribes and Pharisees whose questions to Him were meant to somehow trip Him up or trap Him in His words — anything that they could use to discredit Him. In fact, Jesus faced this kind of testing from the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes all the time; the gospels give the following examples:

Matthew 16:1, Mark 8:11, Luke 11:16: asking for a sign from heaven

Matthew 19:3, Mark 10:2: asking about divorce

Matthew 22:15, Mark 12:13, Luke 20:20: paying the imperial tax

Matthew 22:35, Luke 10:25 (today): asking which commandment is the greatest

John 8:6: woman caught in adultery

All of these questions had something in common: They weren’t sincerely asking for Christ’s insight into an issue that had been perplexing to them. As Matthew writes: ***[T]he Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Him in His words — Matthew 22:15.*** That was the heart behind this “testing” of Jesus.

But also note the question: “What must I DO to inherit eternal life?” The question underscores the mainline Jewish presumption that God’s favor was something that could somehow be earned by their good deeds. And, of course, they already presumed God’s favor because of their being “children of Abraham,” God’s very own chosen people. What more could they need?

***“What is written in the Law?” He replied. “How do you read it?”*** Essentially, Jesus is telling the guy that he already knows the answer to that question — proven out by the answer this scribe gives.

***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.’”***

In this expanded rendering of Deuteronomy 6:5, he is essentially answering that we are to love with the full spectrum of everything we are — emotionally, spiritually, physically, and intellectually. The context of “your neighbor” from Leviticus 19:18 would have been understood by that audience as referring to “your people.” This is a huge distinction because of how Jesus is going to redefine that word.

***“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”***

Now while Jesus is acknowledging that this answer is what needs to be “done” to receive eternal life, it is also implied that this standard — much along the line of ***“Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect” — Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:48*** — is impossible. And He does this by bringing the discussion from a matter of theological abstract into a very practical, earthly application. And the scribe’s response to Jesus verifies that he too understands the standard — and the acknowledgement that for him to live up to and match that perfect standard is impossible. Of course, it is the impossible demands of the law that are intended to drive us to beg for God’s divine mercy through the confession of our sins. The scribe, however, responds somewhat differently.

***But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”***

He is literally trying to excuse himself from this impossible standard with which Christ has challenged him, so he tries to limit the scope of what the term “neighbor” really means. If it can be defined within a narrower context, possibly a more favorable one, maybe he has a better chance of actually meeting that standard. After all, some people would be easy to view as neighbors, while others — maybe because of religious or moral differences, maybe because of ethnic or racial differences — would be far more challenging. He’s in good company: The prevailing opinion among the religious elite was that one’s neighbors were only those who shared their righteousness. Therefore, anybody viewed as “wicked” — tax collectors, prostitutes, Gentiles and, especially, Samaritans — were to be hated and avoided because they were enemies of God. For the scribes and Pharisees, there never would have been any concept of, “Hate the sin, love the sinner.” That was God’s intention, but it was never theirs. People entrapped in sin should literally inspire grief and mourning in us — as it does God. But not the scribes and Pharisees — they literally had elevated hatred to the status of a virtue, obviously making the second Great Commandment completely dependent on the definition of “neighbor.” So, in a sense, the expert in the law is asking, “OK, so what’s the absolute least I have to do here?”

***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.***

In Hebrew usage, the idea of going down from Jerusalem to Jericho has nothing to do with direction — driving “down” to Iowa for us means driving “south” to Iowa. For Jews, going up or down referred to elevation — from a high place to a low place, very literally from “up” to “down” or vice versa. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was 17 miles long. A traveler leaving Jerusalem would

first have climbed up the Mount of Olives (where Gethsemane was located). Bethany (the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus) was the last permanent town, leaving some 10 miles still to go until arriving at the Jericho oasis. The overall journey featured a drop in elevation of anywhere between 3-4,000 feet — well over half a mile. Some of the harshest hills in the entire wilderness country of Judea are found along this path. And the audience to whom Christ is telling this story would have completely understood the idea of a traveler being attacked. That particular road was notorious for the dangers it presented from robbers as there were many places for such people to hide from the unwary traveler until it was too late. The road was also a prime target because it connected Jerusalem both with the mineral wealth of the Dead Sea and the Spice Route beyond that — meaning that the travelers who used this road could often be counted on to be accompanying valuable cargo.

***A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.*** For a Jewish audience, the priest and Levite would have been thought to be the “heroes” in this story. Now, while both the priest and Levite would have been concerned for their personal ritual cleanliness, the text specifically says the priest was going “down” the road; it is thus reasonable to assume that one if not both of these guys were in fact leaving Jerusalem, and that their service at the temple was completed. Now coming upon this man — beaten, severely wounded, probably looking more dead than alive — they easily could have assumed he was dead. And Jewish law would have considered a corpse unclean but, if their priestly duties had in fact been completed and they were on their way home (a number of wealthy Pharisees lived in Jericho), their concerns about cleanliness would have been grossly misplaced. While it is true that both Leviticus and Numbers relate God’s commands regarding the uncleanness of dead bodies, by this time the commandment had been stretched so far that it was thought that even their shadow falling on a dead body would render them unclean. Beyond that issue, they also might have been concerned that whoever attacked this man might still be in the immediate area, thus making it possible that they were endangered by being there as well. However, it is more likely, especially considering the point Jesus is trying to make, that they simply could not be bothered with the probable time commitment and inconvenience of helping this guy. They would prefer to keep on moving.

***But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.***

This is where the story really pivots to an unexpected outcome. Where a Jewish audience would have seen the Pharisee and Levite as lives to hold up as sterling examples of God-pleasing holiness, the hero of the story all of a sudden becomes someone quite different — a Samaritan, a man whose people would have been hated by the Jews.

The Samaritans were the result of intermarriage between Jews and Assyrians that occurred following the conquering of the ten northern tribes (the nation of Israel) by the empire of Assyria (approximately 750 years before this moment in Christ’s ministry) and the exiling of the Jewish population from that area — an emptying of the land that was then repopulated by Assyrians. Jews held Samaritans to be half-breeds who had married not just foreigners but enemy foreigners. On top of that, Jews accused Samaritan of false worship, not holding to the complete faith of their common ancestors — not recognizing the temple in Jerusalem as God’s designated worship center, and only recognizing the first five books of the Scriptures as valid. As a result, a deep hatred existed between those two peoples — illustrated by the fact that devout Jews would even go so far as to walk around the area of Samaria when traveling rather than set one foot inside their territory, even though that would greatly increase the time and energy needed for their journey. Seems like a long time to hold

onto hate but, in our own world's recent history — the Balkan War, fought as Yugoslavia was breaking apart in the mid-1990s — you had ethnic groups — Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Albanians, Muslims — rekindling hatred that went back, in some cases, over a thousand years. It is estimated that somewhere around 133,000 people lost their lives, and the term “ethnic cleansing” emerged (or reemerged) into our vernacular. As Solomon noted in Ecclesiastes: ***What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun — Ecclesiastes 1:9.***

The Greek word for “pity” means to be physically moved with compassion (literally, to have your bowels yearn). Seeing the helplessness of the wounded man moved the Samaritan deeply and personally, enough so that his compassion overwhelmed whatever differences there might have been between them.

***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.***

Olive oil would have been used both as a healing agent and to simply soothe and ease the pain from the wounded man's injuries. Wine would have been used both to disinfect the wounds and as a mild painkiller. Obviously the Samaritan was using his limited supplies to tend to someone who needed those items more. And beyond the medical care, the Samaritan put the wounded man “on his own donkey.” Leading a donkey for someone else adopted what was often seen as a servant position.

To have this, all these things done by a sworn enemy of the Jews, particularly when two Jewish religious leaders came upon the scene first only to pass it by, would have been deeply humiliating to a Jew.

***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 expenses you may have.’***

The Samaritan not only invested time in the wounded man, but also took steps to make sure his care was maintained by the innkeeper, promising to reimburse an extra expenses that the innkeeper incurred in the ongoing care of the man and his injuries. Incidentally, the “two denarii” that the Samaritan gave the innkeeper to “pay forward” the expenses of any further care the man might need would have been the equivalent of two days' wages for a day laborer.

***Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”***

Jesus now returns to the original question that the expert in the law had posed to him: “Who is my neighbor?” — but with a twist: Jesus is now challenging his audience not to consider whether or not somebody might be considered their neighbor but, more importantly, whether or not they themselves are actually being a good neighbor to the people around them. Jesus has significantly redefined the term to mean something far more substantial than their own people. Are their neighbors defined by ethnic or racial boundaries, by religious or cultural boundaries? The point Jesus makes is that “neighbor” is not defined by them or their culture or their history, nor is it up to others to prove themselves neighbor to him. According to Christ, everyone has a responsibility to be a neighbor. It is our starting point — to see everyone around us in that way.

***The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”***

If you're keeping score, that's 2 — two times that the man asked Jesus a question, winds up answering his own question, and then is told by Jesus to do what he just said.

“Neighbor” is now been redefined to mean anybody to whom we have opportunity to show love, to demonstrate kindness — regardless of any other considerations. Love does not have any limits, nor is it defined by any man-made, conveniently imposed boundaries. Everybody and anybody is our

neighbor. That is how God defines who our neighbors are — and that becomes our standard, because that is His standard. And beyond that, the idea of both “neighbor” and “love/mercy/kindness” is now being more clearly defined by being seen not just as an attitude but more importantly as an action — a tangible way to demonstrate the heart.

## APPLICATION

Before we get any farther, we need to remember that this very likely was at some level a real event, something that really happened. Jesus never called it a parable. And I mean, let’s think about: To be telling a story to a critical audience that is making the religious leaders look bad and a Samaritan of all people look good is risky if it’s not true. Jesus could be accused of making up a story just to prove some self-serving point, and it could be easily dismissed with a “C’m on, Jesus; you know that would never happen.” The story becomes much more impacting if it is actually a real event that Jesus is sharing.

So, what is kindness? According to the Greek, it is the grace that impacts the whole nature, mellowing all which would be harsh or critical in manner or attitude. It is always sweet, always mild, and reflects a heart full of graciousness.

And of course, Jesus gives us the template for what “kindness” looks like in the real world. Think about this; think about some of the people to whom Jesus showed kindness during His earthly ministry (not talking miracles but just human acts of kindness that presented who Jesus was and what His kingdom looked like):

Talking to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4): ethnic/racial and gender kindness: Talking with the Roman centurion who had a sick servant (Matthew 8): kindness to enemies: Receiving children (Matthew 19, Mark 10, Luke 18): kindness to the young: Eating with “sinners” (Matthew 9, Mark 2, Luke 5): kindness to “bad people” (people outside of religion): Talking with Nicodemus (John 3): kindness to opposition: Praying for the Sanhedrin whose judgment nailed him to the cross: kindness to hate

At the end of the day, there are several perspectives that show themselves in play here. For the thieves, the traveler was simply somebody to take advantage of, so they attacked him. To the priest and Levite, he was an inconvenience to avoid, so they ignored him. It was left to the Samaritan to reflect Christ’s perspective: He was a neighbor to love, so he cared for him.

And, in this moment, we get a really clear picture of the attitudes of the religious leaders. Their rules and regulations were more important to them than were the flesh-and-blood daily issues of the people to whom they were actually supposed to be ministering. Remember Christ’s words of rebuke: ***“[D]o not do what [the teachers of the law and the Pharisees] do, for they do not practice what they preach. . . . [They] are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside [they] appear to people as righteous but on the inside they are full of hypocrisy and wickedness” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 23:3b, 27b-28.*** So, all the ritual, all the dressing of immaculate robes, all the airs of holiness, meant nothing. As the writer of Hebrews observed: ***Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account — Hebrews 4:13.***

That leadership totally missed the idea of where their hearts were supposed to be — not tied up in law but tied up in grace. A scripture that they would have known, and that Jesus quoted to them on more than one occasion, expressed this, as God spoke directly to the people through the prophet Hosea: ***“I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings” — God***

*speaking, Hosea 6:6.* In God’s eye, even “burnt offerings,” the sacrifices specifically designed to cover sins, were meaningless and basically hypocritical if that particular worship endeavor was not matched by behavior. As James said so well: *[F]aith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead — James 2:17.*

The lynchpin of the whole thing, though, is the definition of “neighbor.” The expert in the law tried to narrow the definition to justify his life. Jesus instead broadened it to condemn that man’s life, basically challenging him with the proposition: Who is NOT your neighbor . . . and then daring him to answer.

## CONCLUSION

We live in a day and age of incredible divisiveness, where things are looked at very black-and-white. In political terms people are most often viewed as either conservative or liberal. So, borrowing those words, what does the Bible teach?

When it comes to matters of our faith, when it comes to salvation, when it comes to the inerrancy of Scripture, when it comes to matters of sin, I am a fundamentalist. If the Bible says it, that settles it. That would make me a conservative.

But when it comes to matters of the fruit of the Spirit, particularly as we’ve looked at the last couple of weeks with patience and now kindness, we are to be unashamed liberals — no limits. You see, in a world that sometimes only seems to show unfeeling selfishness, a total lack of sympathy for those around us, the fruit of kindness displays something entirely different to the world — a world that needs to know the life that is possible through Jesus Christ. Kindness cuts through the world’s issues to reveal a heart that belongs to a kingdom not of this world. That’s the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the kingdom to which we claim citizenship.

And folks, that’s a 24/7 gig — and that remains true no matter what is happening around us. No matter which way the cultural winds are blowing, we go Jesus’ way.

The fact is, we have been given a wonderful platform from which to operate. Jesus Himself is the vine from which all these fruits are growing. Love is the root of it all. Joy and peace are the direct inner results of the life we have rooted in that love of Christ. Now if those three — love, joy and peace — show the heart of Jesus, patience, kindness and the fruits still to come reflect the actions that come from that heart. From what we have been given in Christ, we show Christ to the world around us.

Why is that important? Did you know that over 150,000 people die — each day?

Everything we do in a kind and gracious way, from the biggest effort to the tiniest little thing, can sow a seed that God’s Holy Spirit can use to make someone sit up and take notice of Jesus Christ — because they saw Him in one of His kids: US. Let’s pray!