

## Discipleship @ ABC Autumn 2021



Through September we will be looking at the key Christian values which we believe God is calling us to focus on at this time. By 'this time' we mean 18 months into a pandemic which has left people tired, stretched, fearful, exhausted and in many cases, bereaved.

These values have come from the Big Church Conversation in July when the church gathered to discern God's will for us regarding our values, activity and the issues we face. We are grateful to God for guiding us in this way and therefore have great confidence in God's leading.

5<sup>th</sup> September

**Faith in Jesus**

12<sup>th</sup> September

**Gathered in Community**

**19<sup>th</sup> September**

**Kind to All**

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### 1. Passages Quoted

Galatians 5:19-23

Proverbs 3:3-4 & 21:21

And especially...

Ephesians 2:7 *'so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.'*

Romans 2:4 *'Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?'*

Romans 11:22 *'Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity towards those who have fallen, but God's kindness towards you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.'*

### 2. Questions

- a. We say that there are different *kinds* of cereal and say that it is good to be *kind*. How are those two uses of 'kind' related? The word kind comes from the same root as 'kin', family. To 'be kind' is to show others who are not family that you want to treat them like 'kin'.  
What does this look like in practice?

- b. Sally explained that kindness was a 'positive act'. What have been the greatest kindnesses enacted on you?
- c. Things take a big step forward when Sally explained that God's work of salvation was born out of kindness. How does that affect our understanding of what God has done for us through Jesus?
- d. Quoting Romans 11:22 Sally explained how God's kindness and severity work together. That's quite a combination! Why do these two things fit together so well?
- e. The UK, September 2021. Why might kindness be significant in how the church operates? Think of as many ways as you can.

### 3. Prayer

In response to 'e' above, pray through your answers to that question – what this means for ABC, what this means for us.

Read slowly through 'the fruits of the Spirit' (Galatians 5), asking that God my gift and grow each in our lives.

### 4. Text of the Message in Full

#### ABC Values: Kind to All

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the values we're exploring. Distilled from the big church conversation x3 held over the summer.

- 1. Faith in Jesus
- 2. Gathered as a community
- 3. Kindness to all**
- 4. Speaking – the story of Jesus

What is kindness?

Online dictionary - Adjective: having or showing a friendly, generous, and considerate nature

Synonyms: Good natured, kind-hearted, tender, caring, unselfish, compassionate... 74 synonyms according to google. Compared with 'Love' – google has 29 synonyms

It can sometimes be easier to understand a word, by understanding what it is **not**.

What is kindness not: Galatians 5:19-21 "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, strife, jealousy,

fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” – these are things of the ‘flesh’ the ‘me first’ things, the selfish things that Paul (author) warns are not attributes of someone who follows God. Very inward focussed, potentially damaging to ourselves, relationships and others.

Kindness is one of the fruits of the spirit. Galatians 5: 22-23 “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, **kindness**, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” these are gifts. Given, you don’t need to earn them, but you need to use them. These are uplifting to your soul and to others, outward blessing of others.

Jesus encourages us to ‘remain in him’ because a branch can’t bear fruit on its own (John15:4). So, by being close to Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, we will bear much fruit – fruit of the spirit.

Kindness is a highly prized value/virtue – Proverbs 21:21 “Whoever pursues righteousness and **kindness** will find life, righteousness, and honour.” And Proverbs 3:3-4 “Never let kindness leave you, tie it round your neck as a reminder, write them deep within your heart”.

Micah 6:8 “The Lord has told you what is good; and this is what he requires of you: to do justice, and to love **kindness**, and to walk humbly with your God”

The writer Stephen Witmer describes kindness as “spirit produced” – referring to the Galatians verse previously. “It’s a supernaturally generous orientation of your hearts towards other people; even when they don’t deserve it and don’t love us in return” God **gifts** us the fruits of the spirit. (DesiringGod.org)

So I’ve tried to explain what kindness is, but another way to understand a word or attribute is to see what the word invokes, what the acting out of the word is – the verb...

Kindness is a deliberate act. You can’t just be kind – full stop. Being kind requires you to do something – Paul tells the Colossians 3:12 “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...” So kindness is a **gift** from the Holy Spirit, but we have to take it, put it on and use it.

Galatians 6:9 “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” Consistency – choose kindness. Make an effort. Choose to be kind.

Zechariah 7:9 “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgements, **show kindness** and mercy to one another...”

Jesus - and how Jesus demonstrated kindness in human form when he was on earth 2000 years ago. Loads of examples from the Gospels. He touched and healed a leper, he stopped a woman from being stoned, he healed countless

people, he fed thousands, he raised people from the dead – all of these miracles, yes, but each of these acts demonstrates the heart of God to help, to heal, reconcile. Jesus did these acts of kindness freely, without conditions or expecting anything in return. And not one of those recipients of Jesus' kindness could repay him – all they could do was thank him

So these verses describe kindness as a deliberate action, something we have to do. We get given kindness by the Holy Spirit, but we have to do something with it.

The book of Acts describes the formation and behaviour of the early church. [explain background to Acts] 'One of the remarkable things the early Christians were known for – and one of the reasons for the rapid spread of the faith – is the way they were unstoppable when it came to helping others, both financially and in practical ways. If people were ill, they would nurse them. If they were hungry, they would get them food, if they were in prison they would visit them etc... They weren't only kind to their own family – most people in the world would do that – but with strangers, with people from different ethnic groups, even with former enemies.

'The reason (as transformed, new creation) we are called to avoid speaking evil of other people, not to be quarrelsome, etc (as per Gal 5:19-21 above re: actions of the flesh, what kindness is not), is that we are ourselves the creatures of God's generous love, and if we aren't showing that same generous, kindly, forgiving love to others, then we have obviously forgotten where we've come from. Our obligation to be kind and gentle to others is simply our response to God's love towards us. God loves us, so we must love others – how can we not? When we are kind and gentle to people, that is the outworking of God's kindness and loving goodness – God working through us. In this way people will realise who God is and what he's like. One writer describes it like this: *'The creator of the world is a lavish host, who has sent out a worldwide invitation to his party. We, as his messengers, must live in such a way that people will want to turn up.'* You don't want to go to a party where the people will be miserable and hurtful and all of those things that kindness is not. If you know people at the party will be full of joy, love, happiness, kindness – you'd want to be there!! **WOW 'We, as his messengers, must live in such a way that people will want to turn up.'**

Now, the **ultimate** kindness that we as believers in Christ know of, is the kindness of God the Father, how God showed kindness to us.

God's kindness leads to salvation - Romans 2:4 "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"

Ephesians 2:7 "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

We were once separated from God because of sin. It's important to hold two parts of a contrast together, firstly, what we are by nature (separated from God, when we are born, we aren't new little Christians, we act in the flesh) and secondly, what we are by grace (God saves us and sits us at the right hand of God). That contrast of the human condition and the divine compassion. God's wrath and God's love'. It's not something in us that prompted God to save, not something that we've done, but rather something in God himself – his own unmerited (un-called for, unexplainable, unmeasurable) favour and kindness. That is what compels him to save us, not something we have done. And God can't tolerate the human, flesh condition. He is holy and pure. *Romans 11:22* *"Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity towards those who have fallen, but God's kindness towards you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off."*

How do kindness and severity work together?

This juxtaposition of ... This incredible balance of loving kind attitude towards us, but also an unfaltering commitment to justice/judgement. Answer is that God wants to love us. He sent his son to die for us. He can't tolerate sin, injustice, works of the flesh. He is holy and pure. Jesus showed us that when he told the woman he saved from being stoned because she'd committed adultery – he told her to go and sin no more. AND God wants to love us. It is within him. It's who he is. God is love.

'God's action in Jesus Christ is not a reward for good work already done. It's an act of free kindness and loving goodness (Titus 3:4) And it results, not in a pat on the back because we're already the sort of people God wanted on his side, but in washing and renewal' (and welcome)

What does this mean to us, and what's all this got to do with kindness? ABC, in our mission and ministry?

We must show faithfulness to God and his way – that juxtaposition of not accepting or tolerating anything that separates us from the love of God – the works of the flesh, but at the same time showing that **kindness** to all. What we see, in a life transformed by the gospel – the good news of Jesus -, is the direct result of God's lavish, generous love. And that's why he wants us to be generous, kind and gentle in turn.

*(A sneak preview of next-weeks fourth value might help us understand this. Next week we look at 'Speaking – the story of Jesus') This is a story which is defined, clearly described, readily understood and is utterly different from any other story – any other claim on our lives.) So this is not a kindness which is unattached, untethered, ungrounded – but a kindness born out of the story of God's engagement with us through Jesus.*

When we see ourselves as God's beloved and know his grace, love and kindness, we begin to see others through God's eyes and it elevates the view we have of other people. Even our enemies, or people falling out of small boats on our shores, people fleeing war-torn countries or seeking refuge or the neighbour gives us a hard time – we begin to see others the way God sees them. We are undeserving recipients of God's reckless love – let's share that with others. One of the best ways you can show people God's love is by being kind (and all of those 74 synonyms). Kindness opens doors and bridges gaps. It repairs the broken and restores hope. They are invited to the party, entry is free, and God is waiting.

Kindness is giving without expecting anything in return. This can be to

- Our own family and close friends
- Believers/ church family – the bible has so many verses about 'one anothering' loving, caring, helping, bearing with etc... all showing aspects of kindness
- The poor, widow, orphan etc – through working with charities or helping people we know directly
- Your enemies – love your enemies. Turn the other cheek, give them your cloak