

BE KIND

“Be Kind...Kindness is Everything”. We see this slogan everywhere nowadays. And the message it seems to communicate is that kindness is the greatest of all human emotions. “Love is Love”, we are told, and love apparently is nothing more than kindness raised to the second power. But what does that even mean, “Be Kind”? I am certain the concept is not biblical, but the more I think about the slogan, I’m not even sure it’s a proper human response. So, why am I against kindness? Well, I’m not as far as it goes, but I am according to how the word is commonly used today. I shall try to explain, but first things first. In our Gospel text this morning we hear how Jesus wanted to be left alone. He wanted just a few moments to himself, to escape the world, to hide from all the problems and pressures of the crowd. And so, He entered a nearby house hoping no one would find Him there. But find Him they did, or, I should say, find Him *she* did. For this morning we meet a Syrophenician woman who refused to accept Jesus had office hours. Her daughter was in need, she was suffering immensely, and like any good mother she stopped at nothing to help her child. She refused to accept a “No” from the one person she knew could heal her daughter. And what’s more, she was anything but kind in how she went about it. She didn’t respect His personal space. She was not polite in her insistence. She did not follow the protocol for good manners by only asking once with a “please” at the end. She violated social etiquette for a woman by speaking directly to man without an intermediary. In short, she was very “unkind” in her overall approach. And even when Jesus, in not so many words, told her to stop, she kept at it. Jesus finally acquiesced to her tireless pursuit and healed her daughter. And the woman, like so many others whom we meet in the Gospels, showed her faith by not giving up. She was not kind. But we could also say the same for Jesus. He was not kind, either. He ignored her, refused her, and even insulted her. Such behavior is unbecoming; it’s not in keeping with an image of a Savior. And yet, we know our Lord never sinned. We also know He loved the woman dearly. For such is the Kingdom of God; for her personally He willingly laid down His life.

What are we to make of this repartee then? How are we to explain their strange antics? Well, we can’t as long as we approach God’s Word with our own human ideology. Only humans think problems are solved with kindness. Only humans are convinced that social problems just go away if tolerance and acceptance are practiced universally. Hence our obsession with a forced kindness, and why we have changed the image of God into nothing

more than an excusing, doting, never-really-minding deity. But God is not like this at all. Nor should we conform to a plastic standard. This is why kindness will never be everything, or really much of anything. Think about it for a moment. Maybe it's not this way for you, but for me, I am only kind to people I don't like. "Kill your enemies with kindness" as the old proverb instructs me to do. Kindness is death. It's a, "I don't really care what you think or say so I am just going to smile and nod till you leave me alone". But, hey, at least I'll be kind in my indifference. In fact, if I am overly kind to you, it means you don't matter much to me at all. But if I respect you, I'll push your buttons. I'll challenge you. I'll force you out of your comfort zone and expect you to do the same to me. If I respect you, I welcome friction and struggle and a certain amount of pushback. That's because if I respect you, I see in you something that is lacking in myself, and I want to learn how to make up my own deficiency. Kindness really only works where no real or meaningful relationship exists. Relationships are meant to be mutually edifying; that is, I respect you too much to be kind to you because kindness never edifies. Kindness doesn't create change or foster growth or facilitate understanding. It simply leaves something alone. But being made in the image of God, we are not meant to be left alone. We are not meant to be static and unimpressionable. We are created to be interactive, passionate, striving always to understand and be understood. Iron sharpens iron. Deep calleth unto deep. We are meant to struggle with each other, and ultimately with God Himself.

Christ paid the Syrophenician woman the highest compliment this morning. He engaged her. He challenged her. And by doing so, He helped her to understand more clearly her own heart's desire. In her confrontation with Jesus, she found a perseverance to will one thing. The Syrophenician woman paid Christ the highest compliment, as well. In her rude persistence, she demonstrated her deep trust in God as the one from whom all blessings flow. She proved her dependance upon Him by living the very message Christ Himself preached: "Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest". She understood Christ to be the truth, but not some type of soulless truth to be held at a distance or accepted with apathy, but the embodied truth, the up-close-and-personal truth; the very truth, which actually took up space, moved atoms, altered matter and changed her very world right in front of her. Both were impolite. Both were confrontational and combative. Neither was really kind to the other. In the end, I suppose, they had too much respect for each other for the likes of that. Amen.