



CHURCH of
the SAVIOUR

2537 Lee Road
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118-4136
Telephone: 216-321-8880
Website: www.COTSumc.org

Love Kindness

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Colossians 3:12-17 (CEB)

Rev. Amanda Moseng
Modern Worship Service

Each and every morning we all have a series of decisions to make. When to wake up, what to eat for breakfast, what to wear. One of the perks of the pandemic was that we did not have to worry about putting on our best clothes. We had our sleeping pajamas and our work pajamas. It was nice to wear comfy, cozy clothes every day. Zoom meeting? Dress shirt on top, pajamas on the bottom. For most of us, we make a conscious choice for what clothes we are going to wear that day. We “put on” our clothes each and every day. The author of Colossians uses this image to show us what to do and how we should be as followers of Jesus. “Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” This is a relatable way to understand how we should live as Christians. We put on these qualities just as often (if not more often) than the clothes we put on ourselves every day. Or at least, we should. We recognize that there has often been a shortage of these qualities as of late and these qualities are hardly ever the hallmarks of an election season. This is the reason behind the *Be Campaign*: to remind us of what God expects of us as people of faith and to bear witness to our faith in a divided world.

“As God’s choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” As God’s chosen ones - and that includes everyone. God chooses everyone but we get to decide if we choose God in return- our behavior must reflect the one doing the choosing. These are five of God’s character attributes: compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient. All of these qualities are important and as Christians, we must demonstrate all of them. But we are going to lift up and focus on kindness today. Specifically, we are called to reflect the kindness of God.

We put on kindness, which means that we do the work of choosing to kind and allowing the Holy Spirit to do the deep, internal work that allows kindness to be part of who we are. It is no mistake that kindness is one of the Fruit of the Spirit. The Fruit of the Spirit are the evidence of the Spirit living and working in us. They are the essence of embodied Christianity. They are not just fleeting emotions, but steadfast attributes. They come from deep within, not just the surface. The counterpoint to kindness is being nice. We can put on the air of being nice, we can do the nice thing because it is the right thing to do but we can do so without pure motives. We can pretend to be nice, but we cannot pretend to be kind. Kindness is the outpouring of a life hidden in Christ, the Spirit working in us. It is reflecting the character of the One who created us. Kindness is at the very heart of who God is. It is one of the covenantal virtues of God.

The foundational scripture for this sermon series is Micah 6:8. “He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” We are told to love kindness. The Hebrew word here for kindness is *chesed*. Perhaps you have seen or heard that word before. Our rabbi friend, Rabbi Joshua Caruso, one of our conversation partners back in May, serves at Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple. It is on Fairmount Blvd, close to Richmond Rd. Anshe Chesed means “people of loving kindness.” In Micah 6:8, God is commanding the Israelites to love kindness. To have an affection for kindness. In my Old Testament 2 course in seminary, *chesed* was described as “lovingkindness,” all one word, the same understanding as our Jewish friends at Anshe Chesed.

What exactly is *chesed*? This lovingkindness is faithful love in action. In the Hebrew Bible, *chesed* often refers to God’s lovingkindness demonstrated in the covenantal relationship with Israel. *Chesed* represents God’s persistent and unconditional kindness, love, and mercy, a relationship where God seeks humanity in love and compassion. It is God’s loyalty to covenant, steadfast love for God’s people, and faithfulness to God’s promises.

Chesed is relational. God invites us to reflect this deep kindness within the relationships we have. The author of the letter to the Colossians gives perspective on how we should treat each other within covenant community. Church is one covenant community, among others. What does it look like to have a covenant community defined by kindness? It starts with putting on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We make the conscious choice and commitment to practice these virtues. We are squarely in the fall season here in northeast Ohio, my personal favorite season of the year. Most mornings are rather chilly, so many of us put on a coat or sweater to keep ourselves warm. That was a conscious choice because we knew it would be for our benefit. In a similar manner, we put on these characteristics of God because it is for the benefit of our community. In addition, we are tolerant with each other, or in other translations, we bear with one another. We

do not just write someone off because they are different. We are committed to being in community together and as a result, we have to hold all of our differences in tension. And when we do have a complaint, when someone says or does something wrong, we take steps toward forgiveness.

We put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We forgive each other. And finally, we put on love. "Over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity." Love is the accent piece that ties everything else together. It is that one part of your outfit that completes the look. Love connects everything together because it is the love of God that overflows in our hearts to those around us. We would not be where we are today without love. Our commitment to God and our commitment to each other moves us forward. We choose to love. We choose to be kind.

We choose to be kind because kindness makes the world a better place. When I think of our daughter Mina, who is 3 ½, there are a lot of things that I wish and hope for her in her life. I hope that she always knows how deeply loved she is, by God and by Mitch and me. That is at the top of the list. But what closely follows is the hope that she will be immensely kind. That she will always choose kindness and the kind thing to do. Much like humility, being kind does not mean making yourself into a doormat that everyone walks over or not having any boundaries. Being kind is seeing the world for what it is and deciding to make it better, one action at a time. It is not always easy to be kind and sometimes we get nothing in return for it. And yet, we choose to nurture this inner disposition, this Fruit of the Spirit, knowing that we are reflecting the kindness of God, the kindness God has shown each of us.

So what are the ways that we can be kind? It starts with being kind to ourselves. We are often critical of ourselves and treat ourselves in ways we would not treat others. Kindness is a learned behavior. Since I have a young daughter, I am very conscious of how I think and speak about myself because she is watching and learning. I choose to speak kindly of myself and my body so that she will learn to do the same. We learn kindness by seeing other people doing and saying kind things. We work hard to intentionally build a culture of kindness here at Church of the Saviour. One of our five practices of discipleship is Serve, and the individual component of that is to do five acts of kindness each week. More often than not, these are simple, low-effort actions. Holding the door for someone. Offering a smile. Asking someone how they are doing. Offering a word of encouragement. Recognizing someone's work and efforts. Remembering their favorite coffee or treat and getting it for them. We can also do things that take a bit more effort, such as raking a neighbor's leaves or shoveling the snow on their sidewalk. Offering someone a ride to the grocery store or doctor's office. There are many ways to be kind in our actions, but we cannot neglect to be kind in our words. Our words hold great power. People will remember how your words made them feel, even if they do not remember the words you say. Choose to be kind. We never know what someone else is going through. Just be kind. There can never be too much kindness.

Throughout the pandemic, we saw increased focus on being kind, in part because there was a lot going on, but also because we had the tendency to be unkind to each other. The pandemic sharpened our differences as our nation became increasingly polarized. Just because you do not agree with someone, that does not mean you cannot be kind. This becomes very clear during election season. I would hardly say that most election campaigns are kind. Anything but kind, actually. Which is why we have taken this opportunity to offer a different narrative through the Be Campaign. We believe that there is a better way: one that is just, kind, and humble. Driving around the Heights, I can tell who worships at Church of the Saviour because I see the Be Just, Kind, and Humble yard signs in your front yard. And so do our neighbors. They see that we are committed to being kind in the midst of a contentious season. Or maybe you are wearing the Be Campaign t-shirt, just like me. I got one for our daughter Mina and she wears it to her preschool. Through this campaign we are pointing to what the kingdom of God looks like, to what we believe the world can look like, but it starts with each of us choosing to be just, choosing to be kind, choosing to be humble.

Be kind. Kindness seems so simple, so unassuming, but it holds the capacity to change the world and make it a better place. So let's put on kindness. Make it one of your favorite things to wear. We all have our favorite sweater or sweatshirt; you know the one that you always look forward to wearing once it turns cold. Put on kindness, knowing that in so doing we are reflecting the Divine kindness of God. Be kind so that the world will become a kinder place in return. Thanks be to God. Amen.