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**The Rippling Effect of Kindness** Micah 4:1-5, 7:18-19; 6:6-8

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The prophet Micah came from a village (Moresheth), around 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Micah served God under the kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah around 750 - 700 BC. He was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah, Hosea and Amos. During this time the Assyrians attacked the northern kingdom of Israel, which was defeated in 722 BC and brought under Assyrian rule (see Micah 1 and 5:5ff). God called Micah to speak words of judgment and hope, of impending disaster and future salvation. Troubled by corruption and greed at the highest levels of political and religious leadership, and the oppression of women and children, Micah had the difficult task of proclaiming that the enemies of their nation would even destroy Jerusalem, the holy, capital city (Micah 3:12). Micah spoke of the importance of justice, kindness, and humility, of the coming of a future Messiah, and a time when people would live in peace and without fear.

READ Micah 4:1-5

(Micah 6:1-8, is written like a courtroom drama.

Verses 1-2 are the summons, verses 3-5 are the charges against the people, verses 6-7 represent the defendant's questions of the court, and verse 8 is God's summary demand. Verses 6 and 7 represent a kind of symbolic plea bargain on the part of an individual who understands he or she has offended God.)

Micah 6:6-8

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

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, to walk humbly with your God?"**

This passage begins with a question, "*With what shall I come before the Lord?*" What does God want from me? That is a question people sometimes ask. The worshiper gives a series of answers escalating in value and cost. "Burnt offerings" were those in which the entire animal was consumed in the flames, with none of it saved for eating. (Some of you are thinking about a dinner you once made or had). "Thousands of rams" ups the ante considerably. King David is reported to have offered "a thousand

bulls, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs” (1 Chronicles 29:21). “Ten thousand rivers of oil” is definitely an amount beyond what is possible to materially give.

The worshiper goes beyond the offering of things or animals in asking if the sacrifice of one’s child is what God wants. Although child sacrifice was practiced in many ancient cultures, the old story of Abraham and his son Isaac made the point that the Lord did not want human sacrifices. What does the Lord want from me – the answers range from burnt offerings to a child each misses the idea that it is not *what* God wants but *who* God wants. God wants you, God wants me.

Then in a single sentence the prophet Micah sums up what the Lord is looking for in us. “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, to walk humbly with your God?**” You may have seen that former President Jimmy Carter spoke on January 23 at Brandeis University in Waltham, MA. When he was inaugurated as President 30 years ago in January of 1977, he took the oath of office on a Bible opened to Micah 6:8 which tells us about **Doing justice, Loving kindness, and Walking humbly with God.**

First, Micah reminds us justice is something we *do*. The word translated as kindness or mercy is the Hebrew word, *hesed*, which also conveys steadfast love and loyalty. Walking humbly, wisely, carefully, refers to the whole orientation of our life. What God wants is for us to *walk with* God every day of our lives. That is why the usual invitation of Jesus was most often, “*Follow me.*” Walk with me, step by step through all the stages and seasons and experiences of life. Living with God and living for others means standing up for the powerless and those who face injustice and showing care for those who are hurting and need a little kindness.

Last week in Lynnwood, Washington, a taxi driver found a wallet containing almost \$6,000 in the back of his car, then raced to the airport in time to return it to his owner. Vinod Mago, 55, says he never thought twice. The owner thanked him with \$100, which Mago used to take his family out for dinner.

*“My mother always said, ‘If you’re an honest person, you will always have money in your pocket,’”* said Mago, who drives a Seattle-Tacoma International Taxi Association cab. Mago had just started his shift February 1<sup>st</sup> when taxi coordinator Stanley Lal called to say a man identified only as Peter was missing his wallet. Mago pulled over and found the wallet, stuffed with bills totaling \$5,950. The man, who was planning to buy a car with the cash, said, *“That’s my life savings!”* said Lal, who was rewarded with \$20. Months

ago, Mago found \$640 in his taxi and returned that money, too. *"If money doesn't belong to me, I don't keep it,"* Mago said. *"I know God is watching everybody, every second."* On Monday, a cabdriver in New York returned a bag containing diamond rings worth over \$30,000 to a passenger who had left it in a trunk. The passenger had tipped the driver 30 cents on an \$11 fare.

Quaker missionary Stephen Grellet wrote, *"I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it for I shall not pass this way again."*

I didn't know until I was preparing for this sermon, that there is a "Random Acts of Kindness" movement and that communities, houses of worship, schools, social clubs, civic organizations and businesses are encouraged to observe Random Acts of Kindness week in the month of February. In Weston, MA, for example, the local paper described it this way:

"The idea is that everyone is encouraged to perform an unexpected good deed for someone or some group during the designated week as an act of random outreach.

Some of the suggested "random acts" are:

Write a "thank-you" note to someone for some kindness they've shown you and for which you have not yet expressed your gratitude.

Talk to someone you don't know well at least once a day.

Hold a children's kindness drawing or coloring campaign.

Leave a treat or note of thanks for a delivery person.

Let the person behind you go ahead of you in a line.

The list, surely, could go on and on, but the point is that: "An act of kindness can be large or small, but doing something is better than doing nothing at all."

Many of us have seen the popular bumper sticker is,

***"Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty."***

But think about the phrase for a moment, *"Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty."* *"How do you practice something that is random? You can't. What is random may hit you, but whatever is purposely done is certainly not random. And no act of beauty of is senseless, for the beautiful is never absurd."*<sup>1</sup>

I totally support anything that encourages people to be kind and to do acts of kindness. However, let's be clear - God doesn't call us to random acts of kindness, but

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<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1999.

to kindness as an intentional, purposeful, routine part of our living as followers of Jesus. God wants us going about every day of our lives alert to opportunities to practice kindness.

Random kindness isn't sufficient so a better bumper sticker would be: "**Practice purposeful kindness and meaningful acts of beauty.**"

Practicing routinely purposeful kindness is a reflection of God's character and how God treats us.

### **God's Kindness**

Think about how you picture, imagine, or conceive of God – is kindness one of the words that comes to mind? We often think of words like powerful, mighty, holy, and loving, but God is also kind. Psalm 145:17 says,

"The Lord is **just** in all his ways and **kind in all his doings.**"

God's attitude and action toward us, and not just when we behave well, is often one of kindness. The truth is it's easier to be kind to people who are grateful and kind in return. It is not as easy to be kind to people who act like disobedient children but God is.

Remember last month we shared from Hosea 11:4 where God is lamenting like a loving parent over the refusal of God's people to live God's way.

*"I led them with **cords of human kindness, with bands of love.***

*I was to them as those who lift infants to their cheeks, I bent down to them and fed them."* Sometimes people don't think God is kind in the Old Testament, but as these passages show, kindness is part of who God is and how God acts, even when we're unaware of it or don't appreciate God's kindness.

Jesus says in Luke 6:35-36, **God "is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."**

God's desire and expectation is that we will be kind to others and we are encouraged and warned in many scriptures about how important it is to practice kindness.

### **Our Kindness**

Even if we are operating from selfish motives, it is wise to be kind. Job 6:14, "*Those who withhold **kindness** from a friend forsake the fear of the Almighty.*"

Proverbs 11:17, "*Those who are **kind** reward themselves, but the cruel do themselves harm.*" Practicing kindness usually results in our feeling better about ourselves because we know we've brightened someone else's day, we've helped to share their burden, or to give them hope. American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote,

"Kind hearts are the gardens,  
Kind thoughts are the roots,  
Kind words are the flowers,  
Kind deeds are the fruits.

Take care of your garden  
And keep out the weeds,  
Fill it with sunshine  
Kind words and kind deeds."

The prophet Zechariah (7:9-10) sums up how kindness looks in daily living, "*Thus says the Lord of hosts: render true judgments, **show kindness and mercy to one another**; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.*"

**Part of growing in Christ-likeness is that we are kind to others even when they are not kind to us; this is a mark of Christian spiritual maturity.** The Apostle Paul explains how this contrasting behavior looks in our lives in 1 Corinthians 4:12-13, "*When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; **when slandered, we speak kindly.***"

I don't think it is a coincidence that patience and kindness are next to each other in the fruit of the spirit and that they often go together in many other passages (2 Cor. 6:6, Col. 3:12). 1 Corinthians 13:4 "*Love is **patient**, love is **kind**.*"

Even pastors and teachers are admonished in 2 Timothy 2:24 to remember that, "*the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but **kindly to everyone**, an apt teacher, **patient.***"

February is African-American history month so I'd like to share a story about a man who knew about doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. George Washington Carver was a great black scientist who did a lot with the lowly peanut, both medically and commercially, turning it into a great industry through his scientific skill. Back in the early 1900's when prejudice was even more rampant than today, he used to tell the black community not to let themselves be defined by those who were unjustly prejudiced against them. He was a religious man, and he believed mightily in his baptism which defined him first as a child of God. And he lived and demonstrated it.

George Washington Carver was brought to Washington D.C., to the Senate Ways and Means Committee in January 1921, to explain his work on the peanut. He expected such a high-level committee to handle the business at hand with dignity and

proper decorum. He was shocked when the speakers who got up ahead of him to make their presentations were treated in a very demeaning manner and harassed.

As a black man, he was last on the list and so, after three days he finally walked up the aisle to speak. On the way up he heard one of the committee members say – loudly for all to hear – “I suppose you have plenty of peanuts and watermelon to keep you happy!” He ignored the ignorant slur although it stung him. He was further hurt on seeing another committee member sitting with his hat on and his feet on the table. When the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee told him to take off his hat the unkind man replied, “Down where I come from we don’t accept any nigger’s testimony, and I don’t see what this fellow can say that has any bearing on this committee.” At this point, Carver was ready to turn around and go back home, but as he wrote in his autobiography, “Whatever they said to me, I knew that I was a child of God, and so I said to myself inwardly, ‘Almighty God, let me carry out your will.’” He got to the podium and was told that he had 20 minutes to speak. Carver opened up his display case and began to explain his project.

His discussion was so engaging that the 20 minutes flew by. The chairman rose and asked for an extension so Carver could continue his presentation, which he did for an hour and forty-five minutes. They voted him four more extensions and he spoke for several hours. At the end of his talk, they all stood and gave him a long round of applause. And all because he knew who he was and because he refused to let unjust and unkind people in his culture define his identity.

William Barclay said, “More people have been brought into the church by the **kindness of real Christian love** than by all the theological arguments in the world, and more people have been driven from the church by the hardness and ugliness of so-called Christianity than by all the doubts in the world.”

Sometimes we may think or feel that some spiritual things are beyond us or we just don’t get them. We look at a person we respect spiritually and think, “I could never reach that level.” But the beauty of kindness is it takes no formal education or specific training or expensive preparation. It simply requires being kind and the rippling effect of kindness often leads to more kindness.

God has told us, what is good; and what does the Lord require of us but to do **justice**, and to **love kindness**, to **walk humbly** with our God?

**Blessing:** *“Whoever pursues righteousness and **kindness will find life and honor.**”*

Proverbs 21:21