

“Intentional Acts of Kindness

1 John 1: 1 – 2: 2

Makemie Presbyterian Church

April 19, 2009 Second Sunday of Easter

¹We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ²this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— ³we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

²My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

This ends the reading.

Over 25 years ago a woman by the name of Anne Herbert - a writer who lives in California accidentally started a movement called 'practicing random acts of kindness & senseless acts of beauty.' She came up with the phrase while doodling on a restaurant placemat in Sausalito one day. A man sitting nearby thought it was wonderful & copied it on his own placemat.

And suddenly people all over copied the phrase & started to do what it suggested. The objective of those who subscribe to this movement is to do kind things for other people for absolutely no reason at all other than the fact that they want to make the world a better place. Those who commit random acts of kindness do things like: pay the toll for their own car at a toll gate - and the toll for the next few cars behind them; or take a beautiful plant into the a police station to brighten the environment; or let the person in the grocery line behind you go before you; or smile at a harried clerk in an office; or even complement a stranger.

According to Anne Herbert some of the things that have been done by those who have caught the spirit of practicing random acts of kindness & senseless acts of beauty include: shoveling the snow from a neighbor's walk when no one is looking; leaving a generous tip

for a waiter, even a waiter who might have provided poor service; planting daffodils along a highway; writing an old school teacher to let her know what a difference she has made to her students; even going out & scrubbing harsh graffiti off of public surfaces.

"Here's the idea", Herbert says, "Anything you think there should be more of, do it randomly. Kindness can build on itself as much as violence can."

I like it - I like it a lot - & if I find one of the bumper stickers that are available - I'm going to buy it & paste it on my bumper. I figure it might encourage others & help hold the van together at the same time. Across the back of the van's bumper it will read:

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

And yet I want to offer that to be a Christian is to do not only these random acts but to transform them into intentional acts of kindness. I don't really need to address sensible beauty with Presbyterians, just look at our shoes. We know sensible all right.

In a sense doing intentional acts of kindness is huge corner of our Christian faith: that we do these acts of kindness & commit acts of beauty & we do so without regard to the merits of those for whom we

do these deeds; without regard to the question of whether or not anyone has deserved them, or earned our affection, time, or our care.

When the disciples were gathered in the upper room after the death & resurrection of Jesus he appeared among them, saying to them: "Peace be with you - As the Father has sent me, so I send you" - and then he breathed on them & Jesus said `Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'"

As followers of Christ and heirs of the kingdom, we have been given a commission, we have been given a power, we have been given an authority: the commission to go out as Jesus went out, to do good to others without judgment or criticism: the power to act with confidence & strength knowing that God stands with us; & the authority & the privilege to actually make a difference in the lives of others, a difference that counts.

When we look at the first Christian Community described in the book of Acts, we see the results of that commission, that power, that authority being taken seriously. We see the results of the resurrection being taken seriously.

We see a community in which there is no want or need that is not met, a community in which people are full of joy & hope, a community in which people share with one another & give praise to God for God's love & God's goodness. A community in which people are able to testify to God with great power & to bring others into the blessedness which they know.

We see a community -a fellowship - that is full of God's blessings, because it is full of God' Spirit - because it is full of faith in Christ Jesus & in his resurrection.

As Ted read a moment ago from 1 John,
"If we walk in the light, as God himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another & the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin."

Practicing kindness, forgiveness, & love is what walking in the light is all about. And it has a wonderful effect. It brings us into fellowship with each other & makes us whole.

Ralph Waldo Emerson - the famous American philosopher and poet wrote: "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no one can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

Anne Herbert says “kindness can build on itself as much as violence can.”

Eric Hellmann, an environmental & communications consultant in Toronto who seeks to practice random acts of kindness & senseless acts of love says, "It's what all the world religions are about. We need to help each other if we want to make our society work. It's important to raise each other up instead of putting each other down."

And as my old Granny used to say, “If we’re not here to help each other, what are we here for?”

The Chi Rho Youth Group, an ecumenical group of young people, meets every Sunday evening. During Lent, they wanted to do something to help out our community. An intentional act of kindness. They came up with gathering food. Hunger is a basic need, we all agree on this. They planned this intentional kindness like this. To go out the week before & deliver a flyer that asked for canned goods or dry staples, and along with the flyer they delivered a bag to put the food in. The flyer said, “Put the bag on the porch, or the front steps & they would pick it up, the next Sunday.

Then we contacted the Snow Hill Food Bank at Ebenezer church, run by Mr. & Mrs. Waters, (they are in their 90's) & asked if they needed these supplies. They said, "Yes." The youth collected the food, took it to the food bank, sorted & organized the food; canned vegetables on one table, protein on another, dry goods such as beans, flour, instant potatoes on another, canned fruit on another, and stored it accordingly. There was over a 1,000 items. It was amazing. Mr. & Mrs. Waters, as well as us counselors, were overwhelmed.

"It is ordained to help others" we learned in our opening gathering, the week we began this collection. Not just because it's a nice thing to do, but Jesus, teaches in the gospel of Matthew, that he will separate the goat from the sheep, based on whether we help each other or not. Remember what happens if we don't help? If you need a reminder, read Matthew 25, beginning in verse 31. I will tell you, it's as bad as it gets in our faith journey.

Mother Teresa once said this about her work in the streets of Calcutta: "Non-Christians & Christians both do social work, but non-Christians do it for something, while we do it for someone. This accounts for the respect, the love & devotion - because we do

it for God. That is why we try to do it as beautifully as possible.”

The first Christian Community was so dynamic - so loving - so sharing – so united - because it lived wholeheartedly for the Risen Christ. The first believers knew with every fiber of their being that God's love conquered all - even death itself - and they were eager to share that love with others - that they might know the blessedness of life as God meant it to be.

They practiced random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty - as an act of devotion, & as a natural response to what God had already done for them. And because of this their acts of kindness & beauty were no longer random or senseless - they had a purpose - a holy purpose - the purpose of not only bringing people closer to each other & making a better society - but the purpose of bringing people into a healing relationship with God - a relationship in which both our joy & theirs are complete: from our text this morning,

“We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at & touched with our hands, concerning the word of life -- this life was revealed, & we have seen it & testify to it, & declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father & was revealed to us -- we

declare to you what we have seen & heard so that you also may have fellowship with us. Truly our fellowship is with the Father & with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that your joy may be complete."

My friends - the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a victory over sin & death that is meant for all people. And we give people a taste of what that victory is like when we take up the power & the authority that Christ has given us & go forth - as Christ went forth - to do good, to teach & to heal, to forgive & to raise up, to bless & to play; to feed & to comfort, to bring the beauty of God & trust in God to the minds of others.

Anne Herbert says, "Our acts of kindness & forgiveness should be random & our acts of love & beauty should be senseless, but I say to you, that they should be dispensed generously & without regard to whether or not those around us deserve them – because we believe as Christians, that God is love, and that God dispenses his love and forgiveness to us.

So I tell you this - our acts of kindness, & forgiveness, & love, & beauty should never be random or senseless in their motivation.

They should be intentionally done because we love God, and because God loves us. And I tell you this too - when they are done out of love for God, & in the power of God & our of our commitment to God; the results of our acts of kindness & beauty are far from random & senseless; because they produce fruit for the kingdom of God, the blessings of forgiveness, fellowship, and eternal life for all; “the joy that is complete.” Amen.