

Community and Kindness in the Land In Between

1. We are in that strange time in-between Christmas and New Year's. We are also between the age of Covid and...whatever comes next, whenever it comes. It is normal and expected to feel out of place, out of sorts, strange.
2. We are also out of the time when we went to a location for church one, two, or three times a week. In those days, it seemed normal to sink millions into a building that was only a block from another building that cost millions, both of which were built to do the same thing. (how many chiropractors, lawyers, and churches does one area need?).
3. Virtual church is rather new...but it is needed and growing. But what about community? To really get an answer to that question, we have to change it: how do we form and manifest (demonstrate) community after community has been shattered and rearranged and we find ourselves in a new place where the old answers don't work any more.
4. To answer this question, I want to revisit a story. I want you to think for a moment about Daniel. He was a young man, probably no older than 12 or 13, when he saw his country invaded by one of history's most brutal dictators. He would have been forced to watch his family be torn apart in front of his eyes. He then was brutalized, turned into a eunuch, and marched hundreds of miles across the desert to serve that dictator. He was a trophy, a permanent reminder of how humiliated and destroyed his people were.

5. What would you do? I think most of us would have curled up and died. A small percentage would have decided that they would live – but only for revenge. Like some movie action hero, they would plot and plan for the chance to poison their master's food, cut the throat of their jailers, and lead a rebellion to free their people.
6. But Daniel didn't do any of that. He had Kingdom eyes. He wasn't a pinball in Nebuchadnezzar's arcade. He didn't live a "you did this or I'm going to do that" life. He didn't even post negative comments about Nebuchadnezzar on Facebook. He decided to live a Kingdom Life right there in the most unlikely place on earth – the eunuchs' prison in Babylon.
7. In this place where he was supposed to be humiliated and ashamed and afraid the rest of his life, he chose a different path. He chose to be a representative of the King of Kings. He chose not to react, but to act. He chose to do something hundreds of years before Christ commanded us to do it – love your enemies.
8. Love is our weapon, our mission, and our greatest power...and love always costs you something. Love made the Samaritan stop and help the Jewish man who was hurt. The priest and the Levite passed by, thinking "If I stop and help this man, what will happen to me?" The Samaritan was the only one who thought "If I don't stop and help this man, what will happen to him?"
9. To rise above the world and do right might cost you your reputation and your life. Ask Jesus who rose above the world -- on a cross...and still looked for someone to bless.
10. We have a word for this kind of attitude and lifestyle – kindness. It seems to be a very weak word for such a powerful set of decisions but that is only because we don't understand what the word "kindness" means.

- a. It is not the same as goodness. Kindness comes from “kind” which not only describes an action but its arc.
 - b. Giving to Haiti or to the Red Cross demonstrates sacrifice and goodness, but GOING there and caring for people one on one demonstrates kindness.
 - c. Kindness is caring – active caring – on a personal, intimate level. It is close-in work.
 - d. It is not the same as goodness. Goodness can have a severe aspect to it. What is good for a person or a community may not appear to be kind (food, movies, discipline, school subjects).
 - e. Jesus was both good and kind. He was kind to the Samaritan woman, the woman caught in adultery, and the demon possessed boy but he also showed goodness in his life by clearing the temple, preaching against the Pharisees, and confronting evil.
 - f. Most of us find it much easier to be good than to be kind.
11. So...all of you, scattered sheep who are now part of Our Safe Harbor...how do you find and live out your faith? How do you form community? Well...we start by noticing people.
12. Who is within your arc? That changes moment by moment and that means we have to stay alert and watch – “watch” and pray. Keep your eyes and your heart open. We enter a room and watch for the person to bless, the person to comfort, the person to serve. It might be a waitress, a child with a tummy ache, or a widow who is overlooked now that her husband is gone.
13. Kindness requires an active, caring response to their presence and their need. (I visit with the kids during a youth event not because I am good, but because Jesus is good and he told me to be kind)

14. There are four aspects to kindness.
- a. Friendliness – that is openness, being willing to engage. It is ready to step outside of its own interests. That is why 1st Cor. 13:4,5 says “Love is kind...is not self seeking.”
 - b. Compassion – we can care FOR people without caring ABOUT people. God calls us to go deeper than just outward action. He calls us to identify with the other, to empathize. This is a constant action and set of decisions (“Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” Col. 3:12).
 - c. Generosity – Jesus to the blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mk. 10:51) The giving in scripture is not just descriptive, it is prescriptive: we are givers.
 - d. Forbearance – be ready to be patient under pressure because being kind doesn’t mean people will like you, thank you, or treat you well in return. Jesus calls us to be kind to the ungrateful and wicked in Luke 6:35. Paul says in Romans 2:4 that God uses His kindness, tolerance, and patience to lead us to repentance. God hasn’t destroyed us yet because of His kindness, according to Titus 3:4-5.
15. Imagine a faith community that lived the Sermon on the Mount. Scattered around the world, as individuals, couples, families -none of them would be wealthy or powerful in worldly terms...but they would shine! We would remember them like a flash of light in the darkness, a warm haven on a cold night, or shelter from the firestorms of life.
16. Kindness is purposefully gracing another person’s life with good. It is showing mercy, grace, sweetness, caring...and doing it while looking the other person in the eye.

17. The more you are kind to those within the reach of your hands, the more you will shine, and the more you shine, the more you will attract those who need a visible sign of the Savior, an earthly manifestation of His love, and a hint of heaven in the here and now.

18. You will do something else as you shine – you will make a community. Right where you are.

19. Shine.