CULTIVATING KINDNESS

I. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Thus Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5 which serves as the basis for the current series of sermons on THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT. If ever our society and our world needed to turn away from revenge and retaliation, racism and rancor, hatred and hedonism...it is now. And for that reason I believe it is important for us as a church to focus on the fruit of the Spirit and seek to make the fruit of the Spirit central in our lives and show the world that we believe in another way of living.

- this morning’s message will deal with the fruit of kindness. I have entitled this sermon CULTIVATING KINDNESS.

II. A truck driver stopped off at a roadside restaurant for a quick meal. He was seated at a table eating his meal when four motorcyclists of the rough and rowdy type roared up, came into the restaurant, looked around, walked over to the truck driver’s table and said: “we want this table...take off!”

- the truck driver said: “But I’m not finished with my meal”. One of the bikers picked up the water glass and poured water all over the trucker’s dinner and said: “Now you are...go on and get lost.”

- the trucker picked up his cap and walked out. The four bikers laughed it up for a few minutes. And the one who poured the water said: “He wasn’t much of a man, was he?” The waitress, who was two tables away and had a clear view of the parking lot, overheard him and said: “He’s not much of a truck driver either...he just ran over four motorcycles.”

III. I remember when George H.W. Bush was running for President several years ago. He called for the United States to be a kinder and gentler nation. I fear we have more recently become a much crueler, divided and nastier nation. More than ever we need to cultivate kindness in our culture...in our speech...in our actions....in our legislation....in our governmental leadership....in our personal relationships.

- two years ago Lib and I got some ice cream at Sally’s Ice Cream in Flagler Beach, Florida. On the outside of the ice cream place they listed a whole bunch of ice cream flavors. At the bottom of the list were these words: ‘Kindness matters’. On the side of the store these words: ‘Sprinkle kindness...love one another.’ This was at an ice cream store not a church.

IV. The other year the Lancaster Newspapers reported that thirty-five 5th & 6th grade students at Garden Spot school formed the New Holland Kindness Club to help in service projects in the school and community? In 1994 Oprah Winfrey called for ‘random acts of kindness’ in the world.
Beth Robertson penned these lines:
“When I think of the charming people I know...it’s surprising how often I find... the chief of the qualities that makes them so...is just that they are kind”. Priscilla Martin died the other week and as people recalled her life, time and again they said: ‘She was such a kind person.’

-what is kindness? John Drescher in his book: SPIRIT FRUIT said: “Kindness is love in little things...respect for the feelings and personhood of another....thoughtfulness in action...helping another in need.”

-when I think of kindness, I think of compassion. When I think of kindness I think of forgiveness. When I think of kindness I think of a warm feeling within me...someone has done something nice. Several years ago Steve Sjogren wrote a book entitled Conspiracy of Kindness in which he called upon Christians to engage in random acts of kindness.

I always enjoy reading letters to the editor in the Lancaster newspaper of people who write in to state they were eating at a local restaurant and were astounded to find that an anonymous person had paid for their meal. This is one example of a random act of kindness.

-in that great chapter on love; I Corinthians 13, Paul specifically states: LOVE IS KIND! We know that one of the traits identified with God is loving kindness. In Nehemiah 9:17 we find this prayer: ‘But you O God are a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness’.

-in Isaiah 54:8 these words of the Lord: ‘With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you says the Lord, your redeemer’.

I have found it interesting that the Greek word for Christ is: CHRISTOS. And the Greek word for kindness is CHRESTOS. There is only one letter of difference in the Greek between Christ and kindness. And there is in reality a closeness between exhibiting Christlikeness and exhibiting kindness. In fact, I will go so far as to say: I don’t think anyone can truly be conformed to a Christlikeness without exhibiting kindness!

-Jesus is our pattern for kindness. Jesus was kind to children. Jesus was kind to the sick and the blind. Jesus was kind to those possessed by demons. Jesus was kind to the Samaritans. Jesus was kind to women. Jesus was kind to the prostitutes and those who were the social outcasts of his day. Jesus was kind to the woman accused of adultery. Jesus was kind to the woman accused of adultery. Jesus was kind to Pilate. Jesus was kind to the soldier whose ear Peter had cut off. Jesus was kind to his accusers and even those who crucified him uttering the ultimate kindness from the cross...‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do’.

-are we as Christ-followers examples of kindness? We may believe in kindness but do we behave kindness? Are you considerate and compassionate...polite and pleasing? Do others see you primarily as tough-handed or tender-hearted...having a closed fist or open palm?
VIII. A church usher was instructing a newly appointed usher in the details of ushering. “And remember”. He concluded...“that we have nothing but good, kind Christians in this church...until you try to seat someone else in their pew.”

-I am not talking about kindness only in the profound, but kindness in the petty. On the whole you and I may be considered a kind Christian but what about in the details of living?

-you see, I believe when the Spirit of Christ is really reigning within you, you will be kind in the large areas and in the details. Kindness will pervade your entire personality. You cannot be kind on your own strength alone but through the power of the Holy Spirit working within you. I am not talking about a superficial kindness but a supernatural kindness. Some non-Christians are kind people, but everyone claiming to be a Christian must be kind!

IX. A mother developed the habit the being cross, irritable and complaining at home. But away from home she was all sweetness and light...that’s what I mean by a superficial kindness. One night after being especially irritable she overheard her child pray: DEAR GOD, MAKE MOMMY BE KIND TO US LIKE SHE IS TO THE PEOPLE WE VISIT.

-are you afflicted with a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde schizophrenic life...of giving the impression of being a kind and loving person in public but in real life turning that kindness into cruelty?

-some of you may have heard the story told of Rufus Bucher from the Mechanic Grove Church many years ago who was asked one time if he was saved. He said: “ask my family; ask my neighbors if I am saved.” Are you living for Christ and exhibiting his kind and compassionate spirit? What would those closest to you say about you?

X. Listen to this astounding assertion. Dr. William McGrath of the American Psychiatric Association said: “90% of all mental illnesses that come before me could have been prevented or could yet be cured by simple kindness.”

-the Apostle Paul is right on when he says in Colossians 3:12 ‘Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved: compassion, kindness, lowliness meekness and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive’.

-kindness means caring....caring for the weak, the sick, the imprisoned, the starving, the lame, the lost, the little ones. I believe the quality of kindness really comes to the surface when we are tested. It is one thing to be kind by patting a dog on the head or making cookies for the children or playing ball with your children...those little deeds of kindness are important...the compliments you give as appreciation to another...that thank-you note...those flowers you bought to brighten someone’s day...that gift you gave...we need to be more thoughtful and kind to others. But are you kind when things don’t go smoothly?
XI. Will you tip the waitress even if the service was not the best? Will you still thank someone for their hospitality even if the TV was on the whole time you visited them? Will you still exhibit kindness when the children spill their milk on the table or when the home run hit, not only goes over the fence but through your window pane? Will you still respond in kindness to cutting and critical comments or retaliate in like manner?

- Kindness is tested when we are rubbed the wrong way. The true test of kindness is not to be found in the midst of when things go right, but when they go wrong. Despite the challenges of the COVID 19 virus, are you exhibiting the fruit of kindness in your reactions to the restrictions you are having to live with and with the people you come across?

XII. I want to tell you a true story from the Brethren Encyclopedia which you may have heard before. Many years ago a Brethren farmer purchased a piece of farmland. After the purchase, the neighbors told the Brethren farmer he made a mistake in acquiring that land because the neighboring farmer whose land adjoined his was not a Christian and very hard to get along with. In fact, that disagreeable farmer had an ongoing battle with the former owner of the Brethren man’s property over a dispute about the fence line between the two properties.

- How will you handle that farmer, the Brethren man was asked? The Brethren farmer responded calmly: “I intend to kill the man.” ‘Kill him’ they gasped. ‘We thought Brethren do not use violence.’ He responded: “I intend to kill him with kindness.”

- And so the story goes, when the Brethren farmer confronted his neighbor about the fence line dispute he asked the neighbor where he thought the fence line should be. Immediately the man put the stakes three feet onto the Brethren man’s property. The Brethren farmer looked over the situation and said: “I’ll tell you what; just to be sure we have it to your satisfaction, let’s go two more feet onto my property. The small amount of land in question is minor compared to having a friendly and satisfied neighbor.”

- When the neighbor saw the fairness and kindness of the Brethren man and his willingness to literally go the second mile (or in this case the second foot), his attitude changed instantly and he said to the Brethren man “Aw, why don’t we just let the fence line where it was originally.” And do you know what? That settled the matter. The man was heard to say “I never met a man like you. No one can quarrel with you.” And that is how the good Brethren farmer killed his unconverted neighbor…with kindness.

XIII. Yes, the fruit of a Spirit-filled Christian will be kindness. Not just kindness to friends, but kindness to enemies as well. Kindness takes us off the judgement seat and puts us on the mercy seat. What seat do you like to sit on? The judgement seat or the mercy seat?
XIV. When I was in high school there was a young woman who helped serve food in the high school cafeteria. Her name was Ada...she was a Church of the Brethren young adult...a radiant Christian who always had a smile on her face. She was mentally challenged. As the kids went through the cafeteria line, snide remarks and making fun of Ada were the order of the day...every day for some of the class bullies. But Ada never retaliated and just kept on smiling even though I am sure the comments must have hurt her. But on her face was a radiance that displayed the kindness of Christ.

XV. My how sad. We can treat others so cruelly even turning calamities into cruelty. This is the issue Obadiah addresses when he says: ‘You gloated over the misfortune of your brother and rejoiced in the ruin of the people of Judah. You gloated over their calamity and took advantage of their loss’.

-what would the Lord say to America today about kindness? Is kindness at the cornerstone of our society? Are we as a people known by our open palms or clenched fists? What has happened to us as a nation? Can we turn cruelty into kindness?

XVI. The poet wrote: Scatter seeds of kindness everywhere you go
Scatter bits of courtesy, watch them grow and grow
Gather buds of friendship; keep them till full blown
You will find more happiness than you have ever known.
Gather every bit of love, all that you can find;
With it bind the broken hearts, for love heals all mankind.

XVII. Kindness is the transforming power of life. Kindness and love go together. Christians down through the centuries have had no greater compliment paid to them than that they have shown kindness toward others.

-without kindness we are unworthy to be called Christians...unworthy of fellowship in God’s kingdom of love. If we believe, as the scriptures say, that love is at the heart of the Christian message and way of life, we must start building the kingdom of kindness. Be kind...be courteous...be polite...be compassionate...be thoughtful...be caring.

-but I am not sure you will be able to truly claim kindness unless you are controlled by the King of Kindness....Jesus Christ. Remember, in the Greek language Christ is Christos and kindness is Chrestos. There is only one letter of difference.

-when people speak of you, do they say you are nasty or nice, cranky or kind? Let the King of kindness rule in your heart and life. Commit yourself to him today without delay! The other day I noticed the church sign at the Lititz Church of the Brethren which read: ‘Love and kindness are never wasted.’ Bear the fruit of kindness in your life and you will be blessed and you will be a blessing to others.