



Luke 14:1-14
Believe
Kindness/Goodness

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Today we continue our series titled, “Believe.” We are in part 3, where we are focusing on this question of, “Who am I becoming?” This is really about what God is doing in us – how He is shaping us and transforming us and making us to be more Christ-like in our lives. And so most of the characteristics we are looking at each week are the fruit of the Spirit, as the Holy Spirit works in us developing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The series doesn’t take them exactly in order, as they’re listed in Galatians 5:22-23; and then also a couple are added: that God is making us hopeful people – which we looked at last Sunday with the resurrection of Jesus and the hope we have and the hope that we live in because of the resurrection – and the last message in the series in just 3 weeks will be on humility, which is also not listed specifically as a Fruit of the Spirit. Humility is always a fun topic to preach on, of course, and I’m sure I’ll use lots of personal illustrations because I have a lot of really great humility in my life. 😊

But today we are looking at kindness and goodness. Our statement of belief today that helps crystallize this for us in one sentence is this: **“I choose to be kind and good in my relationships with others.”** A couple months ago at a meeting of the Session – which is the name given in Presbyterian Churches to our governing board of elders – our opening devotional was on the Fruit of the Spirit – what one comes more “naturally” to us and what is more difficult. And one of the things we talked about was that the difference between kindness and goodness is slim. They are, perhaps, more closely connected than any of the other fruit of the Spirit.

And it took me a really long time to actually begin writing this sermon this last week because I was so stuck on trying to understand the difference between the two. In fact, the word used for “kindness” in the list of the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 is “chrestotes” (craySTAhtays). This word is used 10 times in the New Testament, and 4 times it is translated as “kindness” and one time as “gentleness;” But then it is also translated 4 times as “goodness” and once as “good.” So even the Greek word that is translated as “kindness”

goes back and forth between kindness and goodness! It's a 50/50 split, essentially, which shows us the close relationship between them. So that wasn't particularly helpful – in fact, it kind of muddied the waters for me.

The word translated as “goodness” is *agathosyne* (ah-go-THO-sue-nay). It's only used 4 times in the New Testament and each time is translated as “goodness.” So, that was helpful, but there's a lot of overlap here in their biblical meaning. So I dug around in New Testament dictionaries and a Greek Lexicon, and other resources like articles on the two words that are written by people who are smarter than me...and I was having a hard time getting my head around what it is that's different between kindness and goodness.

To try and understand the difference between them for myself, I finally looked up their definitions online at a couple English dictionaries. Here's a composite of what I found online at Cambridge Dictionary and Merriam-Webster Dictionary: **Goodness is the quality of being morally good or virtuous; the quality of being morally right and admirable. Kindness is the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate; caring about other people.**

That was finally helpful. And it helped me even more to boil it down to thinking about it like this: goodness is about who you are morally, and kindness is about how you treat others. That undoubtedly oversimplifies things, but it gets us in the ballpark, and helped me, at least. And if you all already knew that and I'm the only one who benefited from the first few minutes of this message, I'm cool with that.

Regardless, they are closely related, though you can certainly have one without the other. **For instance, a person could be morally good or virtuous but not show kindness to others. This can result in judgementalism or a sense of moral superiority.** Let's say you're talking with someone and they notice that you have some lettuce stuck between your teeth. A person with “goodness” but not “kindness” might let you know the lettuce is there, but do so in a way that makes you feel ashamed or embarrassed about it – maybe makes fun of it, for example. So these people are often on the very straight and narrow path...they do the right thing and

make good choices in life...but they can come across as morally superior or judgmental.

Someone who has kindness but not goodness is “nice.” “Nice” is not the same as “kind” because it lacks moral goodness. So, in the lettuce between the teeth scenario, someone who has kindness but lacks goodness – a “nice” person – will be hesitant to tell you when you have a small piece of lettuce stuck between your teeth. They won’t make fun of you or do anything to call attention to it...but they lack the moral fortitude to let you know about it, either. These people come across as nice and friendly, but they don’t always have the conviction to do what needs to be done...to do the “right” thing because it feels awkward or like they’re being confrontational.

When we look at this passage in Luke that we read a few minutes ago, and other passages where Jesus interacts with the Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders of the day we see that: **The Pharisees of Jesus’ day had goodness, but they lacked kindness.** They were morally good...they were virtuous. They wanted to do the right thing and believed they were doing the right thing – doing the religiously right thing was their end-all, be all, in fact. But in an effort to be “good” they frequently were not kind to others.

And Jesus calls them on it. He’s not “nice” to them...He doesn’t fail to confront them on it. But He’s not mean, either. He’s kind. He doesn’t belittle them or make fun of them...but because Jesus is both “kind” and “good” he calls them out on it. He shows this balance between goodness and kindness in a number of situations – we’ll look at one in a moment – but the woman at the well and Zacchaeus are a couple others that come to mind.

We see all of this in today’s passage. Jesus goes to the house of a prominent Pharisee for a dinner party and he’s being “closely watched.” Right here, we get a window into the balance between kindness and goodness that the Pharisees have. They want to see if Jesus makes the “right” moves and says the “right” things. **They’re all about “goodness” and morality. There’s nothing kind about them toward Jesus.**

And there’s nothing kind about them toward the man with this abnormal

swelling in his body, either. This guy needs medical attention. Now, let's make sure we're all on the same page in what we know about why this is a tension-filled moment. What you and I know as the Old Testament, was the "Bible" of their day. And: **In the Old Testament, the command is given to keep the Sabbath day Holy.** It is one of the 10 Commandments and is reiterate elsewhere, too. Holy simply means "set apart." So we are to keep it set apart from the rest of the week. And one rule that is prescribed to make sure that happens is not to work on the Sabbath day. It's a day of rest. Well, as the years went along from the days of Moses when this first came into being – and this became especially true in the 3-4 centuries leading up to Jesus' day, and for a time just beyond his life as well – the Jewish religious leaders started to define what "work" is and therefore what could not be done on the Sabbath. **At first they were orally handed down from one generation to the next, but then eventually were written. And there were rules upon rules upon rules, very narrowly defined, that they came up with.**

One author writes about this, "For instance, to carry a burden on the Sabbath Day is to work. But next a burden has to be defined. So the Scribal Law lays it down that a burden is 'food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow (you can carry more wine than milk!), honey enough to put upon a wound, oil enough to anoint a small member, water enough to moisten an eye-salve, paper enough to write a customs house notice upon, ink enough to write two letters of the alphabet, reed enough to make a pen'—and so on endlessly."ⁱ

And seemingly, the goal of the Pharisees was to make sure that all of these kinds of rules were followed by everyone – even at the expense of being kind to someone in need on the Sabbath.

So here is Jesus, with this sick man in front of him who clearly needs to be healed. But to do the work of helping a sick person was a violation of some of these Sabbath laws that had been developed over the centuries. And so Jesus asks the Pharisees a question about the lawfulness of healing on the Sabbath. They don't answer, because they know the Old Testament doesn't forbid it, but their man-made laws did. So they were kind of stuck

between their religious goodness and being kind. So Jesus goes ahead and heals the guy, and then He asks them another question – this one more overtly rhetorical in nature – about the help they would give to a child or an ox who falls into a well on the Sabbath, and again they have nothing to say.

Then Jesus tells what Luke calls a parable, and maybe it sort of is, but it's really just more of a teaching that is all practical application. There isn't really a story with fictional characters in it which all of Jesus' parables have. This one has "you" – his audience – in it; it's simply a lesson being spoken to the guests of this dinner. Regardless, it ties in with the Sabbath healing stuff and with this goodness vs. kindness theme. It's a lesson on not assuming a place of status in the world – whether it's a "moral goodness status" or economic status or social status or anything else, and illustrates how goodness without kindness toward others can lead to judgementalism.

And then finally, Jesus closes with a teaching directed at the Pharisee who had invited everyone over, though undoubtedly they all learned from it. And it's a teaching that at least in part, is about kindness. When you're having a party, don't just invite the people you want to be seen with or who can obviously pay you back by having you over some time, but invite those who would be blessed and encouraged and might otherwise not be a part of such a nice gathering. Again, it's about kindness toward others.

What we see in all this is that goodness and kindness are closely related, as I said at the start. But they can also appear to be in conflict with one another. And the reality is, being kind to others *is* a morally good quality. **We might say that kindness is an element of goodness.** So perhaps where there appears to be conflict, it's really one kind of goodness in tension with another. And I may be wrong about this, but it seems to me that Jesus always treats people with kindness, without sacrificing goodness.

Of course, as soon as I say that Jesus always strikes a balance between them, we start thinking through some of Jesus' encounters and trying to remember if this is true. I suppose the one time we perceive that He lets moral goodness triumph over kindness was when he overthrew the tables of the moneychangers in the temple courtyard. But that's only looking at one side of

the story. So you may recall that Jesus did all that because, as He says, they had turned the temple court into “a den of robbers.” The sellers and moneychangers were taking advantage of people who had come to worship during the Passover, many of whom would have come from quite some distance away, throughout Israel and even beyond, and would be in need of an animal for sacrifice in worship. And only Jewish coins were given in worship, but the Roman coin was the common currency of the day, so some people would need to exchange some money. These were normal practices that happened regularly in the temple court. But the business people were being unethical about it: **They were taking advantage of the situation and charging inflated fees for the animals and for exchanging money.**

It’s kind of like when you go to an event of some kind – a ballgame, a movie, a concert – and of course they don’t let you bring in your own food or drink, so you have to buy theirs. And then they charge an exorbitant amount, because: where else are you going to go, right? Or imagine if Communion was “bring your own bread and juice” but we had some here in the lobby you could buy in case you forgot...and since some people show up for church late (not that that ever happens here), and we know they’re not going to run to the store if they’re late...let’s say we decided to take advantage of that, and charged \$7 for a little piece of bread and \$5 for a communion cup of juice – or \$8 for a communion cup of wine. That’s akin to what they were doing, and it’s not filled with goodness or kindness.

And so viewed one way, it seems that Jesus lets His goodness triumph over His kindness in how he treats these shady business people, because his actions are pretty strong. But the other side of this is that it’s an act of kindness to those who were being gouged. **Jesus stands up for those who are being taken advantage of, which is always an act of kindness – as well as moral goodness.**

And so what we see throughout Jesus’ life, including in today’s passage, is that He expresses both goodness and kindness. **With the Spirit of God active in our lives through faith in Jesus, we can live with these same qualities.** And our world could use a little more of both. We live in a world with a lot of people expressing how “right” they are on something, how their

views are filled with “goodness” – but forgetting to do so in a kind way. For instance: how many people quit Facebook or at least take a break, because they’re tired of the lack of kindness as people express their views? And let’s be honest about this: it’s not just “them” who have been unkind – probably *we’ve* done the same thing. But we Christians should be the ones to cut through that and bring a dose of kindness to the table. Those of us who follow Jesus have this mantle to carry forth. Living with kindness and goodness is one way we shine the light of Christ in the world around us; it’s one way that people understand how Jesus invites us to live and what it means to be a Christian. And in today’s world, it’s particularly counter-cultural and would stand out against the norm.

With Jesus as our inspiration and the Spirit active in our lives, God can lead us to live with kindness and goodness...to *be* kind and good people at the core of who we are. Maybe for some of us it’s a whole-heart transformation that needs to take place. Or maybe it’s a smaller shift. But by the grace of God, we can be people who are filled with goodness *and* kindness, much like Jesus, and choose to live into that each and every day.

As we are doing each Sunday in this series, let’s close today’s message by joining our voices together in this morning’s statement of faith on goodness and kindness, **“I choose do be kind and good in my relationships with others.”** Let’s pray...Amen.

ⁱ I can’t re-trace where I got this quote! Ugh. Anyway, this paragraph is not mine.