

Sunday July 12, 2022

First Lesson: Psalm 8

Gospel Lesson: John 16: 12-15

Sermon Series: Fruits of the Spirit: Kindness Effect

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We are continuing our sermon series called Fruits of the Spirit; a sermon series that is based off of the scripture Galatians 5: 22-23, that names the fruits of the Spirit to be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control;

- Where the idea is that now that you and I have been doing weeks of spiritual pruning together in our previous sermon series, so that we might grow in our faith and spirituality; my preaching goal in this sermon series, is for us to take each spiritual fruit, and examine them weekly, so that we can ensure that they keep growing to their fullest potential in our lives and the community that surrounds us.

- For our goal as a Church in my eyes, on both the individual and collective level, is to become effective in these fruits, so that we can achieve the kin-dom on Earth as it is in heaven.
- Therefore, this week we will examine **the bud of kindness** a little closer.
- And so I am going to jump right into these texts these mornings to share this one idea;
- That after reading these texts, I am convinced even more so, **that you and I were created to be kind.**
- You and I, **I am ever so confident, were created to be loving.**
- You see looking at our First lesson of Psalm 8 this morning for starters, where the psalmist says beginning in verse 3 ; *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;*

4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

- What this passage is saying to us all from my perspective, is that you and I have been created in the image of God as I have stated time and time again;
- Furthermore, since God is love, you and I were created in this same fashion of love;
- We also heard in the scripture, our psalmist inform us, that you and I were made to be just a little bit lower than God;
- So how I am taking in this information is that that although you and I **are indeed not God**;
- We have the authority, by the design and work of God's fingers; to invest our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness in God's

love, **and are guaranteed** that our investment in doing so..... will not return void!

- And how do I know this?
- Well Church, I am gravitating again to the words that said *by the work of God's fingers;*
- Where this imagery reminds me of a fabulous designer or seamstress, because you all know that I love fashion right?!
- So in my biblical imagination, I am envisioning that when God made you and God made me, it was as if God is the ultimate fashion designer, when God created you and I.
- So imagine us, walking out on the red carpet, and the paparazzi asking you and I... who are you wearing?
- Are you wearing Versace?
- Are you wearing Gucci?
- Are you wearing Prada?

- My response to them is, “No ... I am wearing the Creator of the Most High!”
- Who Psalm 139 informs us, that **you and I** are created in the inmost being;
- **You and I**, were knit together in our mother's womb.
- Therefore I don't know about you, but **this is why I praise God**, because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
- I walk this runway with honors, because God's works are wonderful, I know that full well.
- **For My frame was not hidden** from God, when I was made in the secret place.
- **When we were woven together** in the depths of the earth,
- **God's eyes**, saw our unformed body.
- Therefore All the days ordained for me **and all of the days** that have been ordained for you,

were written in God's holy book, before one of them came to be.

- Letting us know Church once again, that when we invest in this manner of God's infinite love and kindness, you and I **are guaranteed** to reflect some semblance of the Almighty;
- When we focus our energies in this type of love, **We are guaranteed** to capture some essence of this Shepherd's love;
- When we choose to align our ways with God's loving ways, **We are guaranteed** to possess some measure of our Creator's radiance;
- When we choose to align our Spirit with God's Holy Spirit, **We are guaranteed** to reflect some aspect of God's infinite brilliance;
- Simply because *you and I* were created intentionally to do just this;

- To be the light, in a dark world that desperately needs the light;
- **You and I** my friends, were created to be the catalyst in this fractured world, **that will bring peace in the midst of violence;**
- **You and I** were formed and fashioned to be that beacon of hope, **that will bring love in the midst of hate;**
- And so as a side note; to all of my youth especially out there, when you go back to school, **don't you ever worry about** not having the right clothes or having the right shoes to wear; **all for the purpose of trying to fit in;**
- For you are wearing the best designer out!
- You and I were Created by the fingers of the Most High!
- If any of what I am saying this morning, is starting to resonate in your soul and lift up your Spirits up, oh how I wish I had three people at

minimum, who would be willing to put your hands together and give God some praise!

- So again, when the Word is talking about the fruit of kindness, which scripturally is defined to be **selfless, compassionate, and merciful**;
- Where its greatest power revealed, is in practice to our enemies and amongst the least of these;
- Thereby encompassing what it means to Love our neighbor at its finest, when we show this type of kindness to EVERYONE;
- I will reiterate again, all of this is possible for us to do so...**if we choose to do so**;
- For you and I were created automatically, with all of these spiritual fruits we have been talking about;
- You and I were designed by the threads of the Holy One, by the seams of the Righteous One; to be both loving and lovable.

- **However in saying this, there is a newer phrase that I have observed the younger generation using from time to time, in conversation with one another on social media, that is threatening our potential as a human entity;**
- Where when an individual is unkind or responds in an aggressive manner towards one another; this newer generation will often say, “So and so chose violence today!”
- As an example, if the store clerk didn’t give you your correct change and you decide to go off on them....**that would be and instance of someone choosing violence.**
- Or if any of us are guilty of road rage, (I won’t ask any of you to raise your hand if you are) and decided to retaliate on the road, when someone cuts us off in traffic.....**that would be**

another instance of someone choosing violence.

- In the midst of these mass shootings that surrounds us....**this is an obvious instance of someone choosing violence.**
- So you all get my point by now I am sure, what is meant by a person choosing violence.
- Furthermore, I am struck by this generation's very honest confession in adapting this language, into their every day vernacular.
- For it's a very sobering confession that expresses a universal truth of their understanding of how people operate.
- For this generation is living in a reality, where they cannot assume that they will be safe in their schools;
- For we are all living in a world right now, where it easier to gain access to an assault rifle, than it is for a portion of us to get a drivers license.

- Making choosing violence the normative response for the world we live in today.
- Where people in general from my vantage point, seem like they could blow a gasket at any moment;
- In fact, I personally have never witnessed nor experienced the world to be so vitriolic as it is right now.
- Which is a very different picture from some of the conversations that I have had with people say around my parents or grandparents age for instance, whose overall experience has been the opposite of what I have been naming;
- For **there was once upon a time**, where the school of thought for them, was that most people are more humane this.
- In fact former generations might suggest that people from their life experience are perceived as innately good;

- For **there was a time** in their worldview perspective, **a village did raise a child**;
- **There was a time**, where new neighbors moving into communities, were greeted with a fresh baked casserole or homemade cookies;
- **There was a time** where songs like “We are the World,” rose up in our midst, where all seemed to be on one accord, that every one could make this world a better place, if we just do our part.
- **There was a time**, even in the pursuit of Civil Rights and Women’s Rights, and so many other social Justice movements, there was a sense that perhaps we could get all get this right.. if we work together.
- However after arriving back from Annual Conference, I sensed that we all needed that time together to refresh, renew and refuel for the mission ahead.

- For I have been in several conversations with some of my colleagues, who flat out confessed to myself and others, that they do not believe that humanity will ever achieve what it means to love one another until Jesus comes again, simply because of how toxic our world is right now.
- Letting me know right then and there, that the Church has some work to do.
- For it is time for you and I to become resolved again, to stand up in the name of God;
- Who informs us that no weapon formed against us shall prosper!
- It is time for us all to put on our spiritual armor so that we can withstand the test of times.

- **So these are conversations that I thought pertinent to share for the main purpose of where I am going in this message today;**
- To undergird this thought, that I do not believe the Church emphasizes enough, but I am glad that our upcoming generations are not fearful to plainly name;
- This idea that free will does play a huge part in this spiritual fruit bearing that we have been talking about over these past few weeks.
- For I do believe that **every day that you and I** are blessed to wake up in the morning, **we get to choose our impact** on the world and how we interface with one another.
- **Everyday, that you and I** are blessed to kiss the Earth with our feet, **you and I get to choose** how we bear our witness to the world.
- Now grant you, there are some real challenges that you and I will experience or have already

experienced, that may make being more fruitful in these spiritual areas that much difficult;

- For instance, someone who experiences physical pain on a daily basis, may not always feel like being gracious;
- Or someone who is struggling in general, whether it may be mentally, emotionally, financially and so on; I am aware that being loving or kind is not always on the top of our agenda.
- For I stopped by to also name that the struggle is real;
- And life is difficult....life is challenging....
- Furthermore, these increasing gas prices are enough to make me lose my cotton picking mind alone.....so I say all of this to suggest, I get it.
- It is difficult to be kind or loving or gracious, when times are this difficult.

- **However, I was blessed by a sermon that one of our younger clergy gave at our TIM Pastor retreat that Pastor Caity and myself attended together with other Mentoring pastors and training in ministry pastors.**
- So I would like to capture this story and coin it as the day I made friends with a snake.
- Pastor Blake Stanwood, who is one of our TIM pastors in the Great Plains Conference, and is the senior pastor of the United Methodist Church in Phillipsburg, KS, decided to bring his three pet snakes to our session on Wednesday morning, to make a point about how we can make strides in embracing diversity.
- Now grant you, I don't like snakes...in fact I would say that I have a healthy fear of snakes.
- And so understanding that my fear was most likely the majority of the people's fear, Pastor Blake went ahead and polled the group to invite

us to raise our hands if we were indeed afraid of snakes, and no surprise, most of us were; regardless of our gender, age or nationality—this was a common fear.

- Not to mention when I posted these pictures on my social media page, I received very strong responses from people in our community, who also expressed their discomfort/fear of these snakes, and insisted that I not bring them to the Church.
- So all of this to say, Pastor Blake one can imagine, had a very tough challenge ahead for him in his sermon on diversity.
- For most of his audience immediately checked out of the conversation or averted their eyes altogether, because he was holding these three snakes.
- Heck, most of you may be checking out on this sermon right now, because I am talking about

snakes and showing pictures of Pastor Caity and myself holding these snakes.

- However, you all...something happened in that room that I will do my best to describe, when Pastor Blake started educating us about his pet snakes.
- For Blake went into the history and education of how a person could tell the difference between a poisonous snake and a venomous snake.
- Pastor Blake went into detail about his passion for his pet snakes and how he essentially trained them to be domesticated.
- Like for instance, **we were all amazed** with how snakes could live to be at least 30 years old.
- **We were all amazed** to learn about their shedding and feeding cycles; not to mention we were all intrigued with how Pastor Blake was handling these pet snakes with such care and love;

- However, the best thing that really drew a lot of us in, was Blake's passion for these snakes.
- We were captivated by his dedication and care for these snakes, so much so that by the end of his presentation, he called upon some volunteers to join him up front, with the caveat that the volunteers must be the ones who were afraid of the snakes.
- And guess what, the people came up and they held the snakes!
- Which then led Caity and myself and others to go up there to hold these snakes!
- It got so chaotic up there, that people who were initially fearful and turned off by the presence of these snakes, were waiting in line to hold these snakes and take selfies with it!
- At the end of his presentation of the snakes, Pastor Blake posed the question that I will paraphrase just a bit; "What would the world

look like if we embraced people in a similar manner?”

- What would the world look like, if instead of some of us staying stuck in our own social circles out of fear, discomfort and more; what would it look like if you and I were to step out of our comfortable silos, to really see and embrace the people...All People?
- What would the world look like if you and I took the time to listen to someone's story that is not from our every day circles?
- Furthermore, how was this pastor able to convert a group of people, who were essentially afraid of snakes, to be standing in line to hold and take selfies with these snakes?
- You see Church, all it took was about 20 minutes of education regarding these snakes, along with building a relationship with Blake and others in our brief time together, for me and

others to be able to be fully present and invested in Blake's presentation and story.

- So again I ask, what would the world look like, if we all chose to take the time to invest in others in a similar way?
- You see Church, this modern day parable that I shared with you this morning, I believe can really inform our work together, as we continue to seek inclusion for all people in our Churches and communities that surround us.
- For if through meaningful relationship building, a group of fearful snake onlookers, can become tentative snake handlers; what would it look like if we intentionally created safe spaces for people to begin to really connect with one another?
- What are the possibilities of building communities, where people of all walks of life can really relate to one another?

- And you know, I have to commend the Great Plains Conference, because after Pastor Caity and myself's snake experience, the week got even better...because our conference accomplished what I have been naming!
- For over 1300 people, both laity and clergy gathered this week in La Vista, NE, to worship together and praise God together; something we haven't done in 3 years because of the pandemic.
- However, this time, when we came together, I noticed that we were not the same; (show the pictures)
- For there was more diversity amongst this group that I have ever seen before;
- And the best part for me, was seeing that the diversity was not there to just populate the place; the diversity in all of its richness and

glory ,was invited into the space to share our gifts.

- **For the first time ever**, the Ordination and Commissioning service included worship that reflected different cultures and ethnicities; one of them being a portion of our own multi-cultural worship and praise team here at First United Methodist Church of Lincoln, NE.
- **For the first time ever**, people of all walks of life were together, standing and dancing together and praising God at an ordination/ commissioning service at that, and if I can be honest with you Church....I couldn't believe it, it was definitely a kin-dom moment.
- For the Gospel of John 16 came alive this week for myself and others where it says; *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but*

will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

- So the truth many of us witnessed, I am here to declare— our Great Plains Conference captured and then some;
- **The truth** that we are all God’s people, in all of our different hues, origins, beliefs and more;
- **The truth**, that we are all created in the image of God, and as Romans 12:6 tells us, in this image, *We all have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.*
- Our conference **captured the truth**, that we are all created to be kind and loving in God’s image, and made space for this image to be able to develop in all of its fruitfulness and potential.
- Letting us all know in that moment, that we do not need to wait for the Second Coming of Jesus for us to be able to catch a glimpse of the kingdom

- All we were focused on, in fact all we were grateful for, was being able to be together, in all of our differences and commonalities of being connected as God's Children.
- Thereby informing each one of us in that moment, that yes we can choose to create this Kingdom in the Here...and in the now...and the forevermore..... yes we can!
- This Church is the potential of the Kindness Effect!
- May the Words from my mouth, combine with the collective thoughts of our hearts, be filled with even a mustard seed of hope, curiosity and anticipation, for greater days ahead!
- Amen!