

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, Luke 6:27-36

Sermon Title: "Love is Kind"

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As we continue our journey through this season of Lent and through the sermon series based on 1 Corinthians 13, today I want to reflect on what it means for love to be kind.

On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007, the town of Greensburg, Kansas – a town that is slightly smaller than 1.5 square miles, was hit directly by an EF5 tornado which was estimated to be 1.7 miles wide. At least 95 percent of the town was leveled. The following year, my home church took 3 groups of volunteers to help with the rebuilding efforts in Greensburg, and I was able to go on 2 of them. Now these mission trips, which I have talked about many times, were an opportunity to allow our Christian love to manifest through the work of our hands. Love and to love were the reasons that we went on such trips.

Now of course, even after a year had passed since the tornado, there was certainly no shortage of work to be done, no shortage of lives needing to be rebuilt and restored. The devastation was still unbelievable as many homes and businesses still laid in rubble, waiting for their turn to be loved back to life. So, we got put to work, on various projects from clean-up to construction, which of course was what we came to do. And near the end of the week, as we had finished up another assignment we were given our next one – a project that had some finishing work to be done inside and some work on a deck out the back of the house. So the next day, we pulled up to our new work site and we all starred in wonder at the house that we had just pulled up to. For the area, it was like a mansion. It was a big, beautiful home, grand vaulted ceilings, and top-of-the-line everything, new construction, bottom up as most of the homes were. And seeing our new assignment, my 17 year old self and my love turned less than kind. I remember approaching my pastor upset that we were there. As we looked around the town and saw so much devastation, so many people now living in FEMA trailers and so many homes and lives that to me seemed much more deserving of our labor, why we were working on this huge home – these owners clearly didn't need the help, or so I thought.

And while I don't remember my pastor's exact words, I remember his calm and kind demeanor as he remind me why we were there – to work and to love and not to judge. To care, to be generous, and to help. In essence, the very definition of what it means for our love to be kind.

When Jesus shares the teaching that we hear today regarding love from the Gospel of Luke, this passage that talks about loving our enemies and not just the people who love us in return, that shares with us the golden rule, and that encourages us to be merciful and kind as our God in Heaven is merciful and kind, at the very heart of this teaching is a call for us to exam the limitations that we place on our love. "I will love you, I will offer you care, I will be kind to you, I will be generous with you, I will help you, if..." Jesus is calling us to look at those "ifs", those conditions we put on how and who we love. And to take those conditions and destroy them. So that our mantra becomes, "I will love you, I will offer you care, I will be kind to you, I will be generous with you, I will help you." Period.

Now, I want to take us back to Greensburg for a moment. For we eventually got to hear the family's story. We could see the need, for this family was taken advantage of by a contractor, as happens too terribly often in the aftermath of disasters, and this contractor framed out their home and then took their money and ran leaving the family completely broke with just some wood beams around them. And this family, in their big beautiful home, would end up hosting our next mission group, allowing us to sleep on their floors, invade their bathrooms and kitchen, tracking mud, dirt, all sorts of filth into their home at the end of a hard day's work. They were certainly a pay it forward kind of people. And hearing this all is wonderful, it makes us feel good. It makes us feel like they were in need and that they were then willing to share from their blessing. Yet, in the end, none of it should matter when it comes to our loving them. For when Jesus talks about love in our Scripture today, he is not talking about love as something that we do to gain love ourselves or to gain generosity toward us. In fact, if those are our motives or our conditions to love, we are not doing it right.

Beloved People of God, the only conditions that should be on love are around how our love manifests and not on how or with whom it is shared. 1 Corinthians 13 gives us the framework for what love should be, how love should look, and feel, and be expressed while Jesus directs us to whom we are to love – and the answer should not be surprising. We are to love enemy and ally. Friend and stranger. We are to love the people we feel are deserving and those whom we don't. Those who support us and those who are against us. We are to love people who think like we do and those who think differently. And we could go on and on trying to express the full breadth of what unconditional means when it boils down to one idea – love all. Yet, the hard part for us is how do we do it? Because whether we like it or not, we have conditions that we have put on love – conditions that are taught to us, engrained within us by our culture, our society, our upbringing and so on, conditions that wedges divides between people and love – conditions that stand against what our faith teaches but that are hard to overcome.

And to break these conditions will not always be easy and it will take time. And sometimes it will take asking for forgiveness after making a mistake when we should have loved differently. But might I suggest one way to start? In our world, especially today, in these moments in which we live, there is a lot of unkindness going around. Unkind things being said – I think one of the worst places right now is on Social Media, Facebook and so on. May we each commit ourselves to being kind. And before we say something, or do something, or on Facebook, share something, may we ask ourselves if it is kind. Is it helpful, is it caring – will it bring healing and wholeness, open up authentic, respectful dialogue or is it going to reinforce the divides even further? When Jesus says love our enemies, he is encouraging healing of the divisions. And it does not matter if that love is reciprocated, we do not love to be loved in return, we love because, if in only a small way it will healing the world and closer to us, it will heal our hearts. So may our love be kind, may our love begin healing, may our love be unconditional, and may our love be a beacon of light that stands as a testimony of our faith. Amen.