

Radical Kindness

East Ontario, Holy Trinity and St. Mary's

(ISAIAH 49:1-7; JOHN 1:29-42)

Holy God, may only the truth be spoken and only the truth heard. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, I'll level with you. Reading the scripture passages this week, a message landed on my heart. But I realized when it came time to write this sermon that to get from a teaching of the texts to the application for life that I want to talk about, that I'd lose all my time to close reading and never get to the point. And worse: that I'd run the risk of sounding like one of those guys who is trying to connect a few too many photos and newspaper clippings and notes all with yarn and tacks. So, I'm gonna do something that I think is not very good practice but feels right this week. I'm going to skip over the Bible interpretation, and just talk about how we should live. Here's what I want to say.

To live a spiritual life, in the way of Jesus, is *more* than finding personal wholeness; it's more than finding in God: *the something missing in our lives*. It's at least that. But it's more. The spiritual life, in the way of Jesus, is to find in God a

wholeness that constantly offers—even empties itself—in self-giving. The spiritual life, in the way of Jesus, is to pour out from our wholeness with God to try as we might to help others find wholeness: to help others find justice, find love, find care, food, clothing, friendship, belonging.

Spiritual wholeness comes as we meditate or read the Bible or participate in Sunday worship or get in touch with the natural world. Those things are a *must* for the spiritual life. We should *at least* have some measure of personal spiritual wellness. But beyond those basics of spiritual self-care, the way of Christ is to pour out from an overflowing cup into the lives of those we meet; to pour out from an overflowing cup into the towns in which we live, and the countries in which we work and vote and serve. Jesus comes to us, as John says, “*full* of grace and truth,” and from that fullness he “takes away the sin of the world.” And he does so by offering his life in service to the poor, the sick, the hopeless, the lost. And in the most intense moment of his self-offering, he ultimately takes the place of a sinner on the cross, so that, in turn, all people can receive from him *his* place as a child of God. He takes our place as sinners and give us his place as a child of God

As your preacher, I’ve spoken mainly about how to find or grow in a deeper relationship with God through Christ—so that we can experience more fully the personal wholeness and wellness that comes from being healed and reconciled to God by Christ. Less often have I emphasized what other preachers make the bread

and butter of their preaching diet, and it's this: that we are called to live with a radical kindness toward our neighbours. Our love is meant to be expectation-defying, and, even, world shaping. But how often do you, like me, discover that you are not ready to love someone who you think is *downright wrong*. Just the other day I caught myself thinking, I don't want to talk to people who travel to the USA right now! Christian kindness is for even those we have good reason to be mean to. That even stands when you're mad at someone driving poorly.

Let it sink in anew how Paul wrote in Romans 5, "while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." We can miss the radicality of God's kindness here; especially if we hear "ungodly" and think, oh, it's just a word religious zealots use to shame people who aren't actually that bad or at fault. True, God does see through the B.S. of self-righteous zealots. But God's radical kindness is expectation-defying, in that, if I could re-word Paul's sentence: "at the right time, Christ died for" even people who do not deserve our kindness.

The human way with each other is to forever repay evil for evil. Sometimes God deals with us on our own terms, and it's called wrath. But when God deals with us on God's terms, it's called grace, and it's a payment of good for evil.

And it's the effect of grace here that counts. The effect of grace is that God basically "kills us with kindness." God breaks the cycle of evil for more evil for more evil. In Christ, by dying for the ungodly, God's kindness I meant to "kill" the

person in us who forever wants to repay evil for evil. And the Holy Spirit gives to those who are willing to receive it, a new heart; a heart that is ready, in its spiritual fullness, to let's its cup run over with good even toward those who, in our eyes, may not deserve it.

Let me bring it down to earth a little. Most of our daily interactions with people can't be described as exchanges of good or evil. Most of our daily interactions are pretty bland, sometimes annoying, sometimes small disagreements at home, a poor choice of words, a little jealousy, a little too sensitive an ego, a lack of a sense of humour, impatience, laziness, distraction. It's often these undramatic, low-stakes interactions with each other where we forget that radical kindness is required there too. Most of our moral actions aren't feats of spiritual strength; just small maintenance; it's just good practice. I love a line from one of my favourite superhero movies: Hellboy II. Hellboy sits on his couch with crushed beer cans and crumpled candy wrappers all around him, and he says about his frustrated wife: "I would give my life for her; but she also wants me to do the dishes." Radical kindness is often undramatic and bland and unsung. But it's the goodness deep down in the fibers of life that keeps our social fabric from ripping.

Our job as followers of Christ is first to find the spiritual wholeness he offers, and then to offer ourselves like he does, to pour out of our over-flowing cup, to spread real, practical acts of love: food given, time given, talent given,

money given, friendship given, forgiveness given, prayers given, attention given,
acts of service given.

If your cup overflows with God's blessing in your life; pour it out for others,
just as Christ, full of grace and truth, poured out his life to take away the sins of the
world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.