**Be kind to one another**

Text: Ephesians 4:32

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**Scriptures:** Micah 6:8; Ephesians 4:17-32

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 103, 176, 69b, 204, 531+532

**Series:** The ‘one anothers’ of Scripture (#3)

**Theme:** The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians about their new identity in Christ and exhorts them to be kind to one another, tender-hearted, and to forgive one another, as God in Christ has forgiven them.

**Proposition:** Brothers and sisters, as new creations in Christ, put on the new self and be kind to one another.

**Introduction**

Kindness towards one another has been promoted by our New Zealand government as part of our collective response to the current pandemic. “Be kind” has become one of Jacinda Ardern’s quotable phrases. However, kindness and the benefits of being kind are not a new idea dreamed up by our politicians, kindness is one of the significant themes of Scripture, for example:

* Naomi talks about the Lord’s kindness when she speaks to Ruth about Boaz "*May he be blessed by the LORD, whose* ***kindness*** *has not forsaken the living or the dead!"* (Ruth 2:20).
* The covenant love of the Lord is translated in some English versions of the Bible as ‘lovingkindness’ e.g.: “*How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings*” (Psalm 36:7).
* The Lord’s wisdom is about being kind is revealed in Proverbs: “*Whoever pursues righteousness and* ***kindness*** *will find life, righteousness, and honour*” (21:21). The excellent woman described in Proverbs chapter 31 ‘*opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of* ***kindness*** *is on her tongue*’ (v26).
* The Lord, through His prophet Zechariah calls His people to “*render true judgements, show* ***kindness*** *and mercy to one another*” (Zech 7:9).
* The Apostle Paul warns those who self-righteously judge others: “*Or do you presume on the riches of his* ***kindness*** *and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's* ***kindness*** *is meant to lead you to repentance?*” (Rom 2:4).

Kindness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:20) along with love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. A believer’s first experience of God’s grace in Christ is described by Paul when he writes to Titus ‘*when the goodness and loving* ***kindness*** *of God our Saviour appeared*’ (Tit 3:4). In summary, God Himself is kind towards His people and calls us to be kind towards others.

In the section of his letter to the Ephesians 4:17-24 that we heard a few minutes ago, the Apostle Paul uses the word picture of changing clothes to describe the pattern of life of the old unconverted self in contrast to the new self as a creation in Christ. Paul describes a number of items of ‘character clothing’ which make up the new self, in contrast to a number which are only fitting for the old self. One of these ‘items’ is kindness. However, we’re going to begin with the characteristics of those who are ‘*alienated from the life of God*’ (Eph 4:18) in our first point:

1. **Put off unkindness**

What is the opposite of kindness? Meanness, selfishness, harshness, hostility, mercilessness, indifference. It is not surprising that the ‘items’ make up the character clothing of the ‘old self’ are those of an unkind person: anger (4:26,31), wrath (4:31), malice (4:31) and bitterness (4:31). We’re going to look now at each of these unkind thoughts, words and behaviours:

**Anger** is mentioned by the Apostle Paul in 4:26: “*Be* ***angry*** *and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger*” and again in verse 31: “*Let all bitterness and wrath and* ***anger*** *and clamour and slander be put away from you*”. The Greek word translated ‘anger’ here refers to an inner, deep resentment that seethes and smoulders. We could broadly describe this in human beings with a term like ‘**cold anger**’. This type of anger is generally internalized and results in withdrawing from the person that you are angry with by stopping, or significantly reducing, communication. This type of anger can linger for days, weeks, months, years, decades. “*Do not let the sun go down on your anger*” calls for us to act in such a way that we rapidly resolve the issues which have led to our anger.

**Wrath** is similar in meaning to the anger. The Greek word translated here ‘wrath’ was used to refer to violent movements of air or water and came to mean “well up” or “boil up”. Here it refers more to a passionate outburst of rage; an anger which is agitated and that rushes along relentlessly. We could broadly describe this in human beings with a term like ‘**hot anger**’.

Anger can be ‘cold’ or ‘hot’ it can also be categorized into either righteous or unrighteous anger. The anger of people of human beings is often unrighteous. It’s important to remember that anger is always a **response** to a situation. We always have a choice as to how we will respond to injustice, provocation or when things do not go as we wish or expect. God is not angry by nature, His righteous anger is His holy response to sin (e.g. Isaiah 30:27, 28). When Jesus entered the temple in Jerusalem and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons, He was perfectly righteously angry for the glory and honour of His Heavenly Father (Matt 21:12-13). Proverbs 29:22 wisely states that “*A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression*”. 2nd century AD Roman Emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius wrote: “*How much more grievous are the consequences of anger than the causes of it*”. An example of this is when Moses struck the rock in anger twice, when God had told him only to speak to it (Num 20:10-13), as a result, he never entered the promised land (Deut 32:51-52). The anger of the ‘old self’ in human beings ‘*gives opportunity to the devil*’ (v27).

**Malice** is another aspect of the ‘old self’ which is identified in Ephesians 4:31. It refers to a vicious disposition, an evil character, a mean-spirited, spiteful nature. Malice has been described as "*that peculiar form of evil which manifests itself in a malignant interpretation of the actions of others, in attributing of them all to the worst motive*."

**Bitterness** is often closely associated with wrath and anger in fallen human beings like you and me. The word in Greek here originally meant pointed or sharp. It was also used to describe plants that produced inedible or poisonous fruit. When used of a person’s character, it describes long-standing resentment which refuses to be reconciled. Bitterness reflects a brooding grudge–filled attitude, an unwillingness to forgive or a harsh feeling. Bitterness harbours animosity and keeps score of wrongs (in contrast to love – 1 Cor 13:5). The bitter ‘old mindset’ is sour, ‘prickly’ and poisonous. Simon, who had been a magician, wanted to purchase the power which he saw at work in the ministry of the Apostles. Peter confronted him because his heart was not right before God (Acts 8:21), saying “*for I see that you are in the gall of* ***bitterness*** *and in the bond of iniquity*." Simon ‘Magus’ was displaying the character of the old self.

Have you spotted any areas where you have a tendency to be unkind? In cold brooding anger which gives others the ‘silent treatment’? In hot outbursts of anger which stir up strife? In mean spirited malice? In unforgiving prickly grudge-filled bitterness which lingers in your heart like a cancer? Brothers and sisters, we need to put off all these unkindness’s towards others and instead put on kindness, which brings us to our second point:

1. **Put on kindness**

Do you ever wake up in the morning and wonder what clothes to wear? Verse 24 of Ephesians 4 reveals how each one of us is to ‘dress’ for another day of our lives lived for Christ: “*put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*”. The clothing of the ‘new self’ is the restored image of God in each of His chosen people. This is described in our text “*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you*”.

The word translated ‘**kind**’ has the basic meaning of being well adapted to fulfil a purpose and so describes that which is useful, suitable, excellent, serviceable. Kindness embodies the attributes of loving affection, sympathy, friendliness, patience, pleasantness, gentleness, and goodness.

Kindness and tender-heartedness are closely related. The Greek word underlying ‘**tender-hearted**’ literally means "having strong, healthy bowels". The inner organs of the heart, lungs, liver and upper bowels were considered the seat of emotion and intention in the ancient world. We have an expression in English which captures this idea somewhat when we say, “I feel it in the pit of my stomach” or when we express deep feeling and say, “I am broken hearted” or “that was gut-wrenching”. The word ‘tender-hearted’ means compassionate, easily and quickly moved to love, pity, or sorrow. It describes a person having tender emotional feelings of kindness towards someone else.

Kindness, tender-heartedness and being willing to forgive others are closely related. This Greek word ‘**forgiving’** has the basic meaning of ‘to give’. To forgive someone is to grant them a favour. It is an act of grace. To forgive is to give gratuitously, generously and in tender-hearted kindness. Forgiveness gives out of grace to help those who do not deserve it. Forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel. Apart from God’s forgiveness of sin through the work of Christ, there is no ‘good news’.

We can be greatly encouraged to put on the new clothes of the character of Christ: kind, tender-hearted and forgiving because this is what the ‘new self’, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24) looks like. Paul expresses this good motivation at the start of Ephesians chapter 5: “*Be imitators of God, as beloved children*”. Literally ‘mimic’ the character of God because you are part of His family as adopted sons and daughters.

There is another, closely related motivation expressed when Paul writes “*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you*”. The Apostle is describing the character of the new self as being like ‘gospel clothing’ to be put on. Put on kind tender-hearted forgiveness **because** “*God in Christ forgave you*”. The saved sinner’s gratitude for forgiveness in Christ is the greatest motivation to be kind.

This is the key difference between those who are alive together with Christ and those who have not experienced God’s grace. Whilst unbelievers can certainly be kind, they are not motivated by love for Christ. Therefore should not we, brothers and sisters, be the kindest of people in the world? Why? Because we remember Jesus!

1. **Remember Jesus**

Jesus is the kindest person who has ever lived on this earth. We see the tender-heartedness of Jesus recorded in the gospels, for example: “*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*” (Matt 9:36); “*When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick*” (Matt 14:14)

When Jesus arrived in a town called Nain, He met with a funeral procession for the only son of a widow there. He could have responded in a variety of different ways: Just continued on his way – He was not a member of the widow’s family or of her community; Stopped to raise her son from the dead **just** because that would show everyone His power and authority; Performed a miracle **just** to give glory to God. Jesus did demonstrate his power and authority and He did give glory to God when He said to the young man “arise”. He also demonstrated His perfectly kind tender-heartedness. Luke records that “*When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep*." (Luke 7:13).

Jesus was kind to a leper who said to him: "*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean*." (Matt 8:2). To which Jesus kindly stretched out his and hand touched him, saying “*I will; be clean*” (Matt 8:3). Lepers were outcasts, living apart from society being ‘unclean’ and ‘untouchable’. Jesus was kind and compassionate toward those who needed help – whoever they were.

Jesus was kind to Zacchaeus the tax-collector, going to his house, even though Christ was greatly criticised for this (Luke 19:1-10). Jesus explained this kind act, saying: "*Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*." (Luke 19:9-10). Would you be willing to share a meal with a convicted criminal, a known sinner so that you could proclaim the gospel to them? To do so is kind.

Xenophobia – dislike of, or prejudice against, people from other countries, races, or backgrounds - is very common in this world and is also often present in the church. Think of the way in which Christ spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, as recorded in John 4. He was kind to this sinful woman, perfectly displaying the character clothing of which Paul writes in our text. The Samaritan woman is a foreigner and in the eyes of a Jew, she was viewed as a gentile. By preaching to a Samaritan woman, Jesus broke societal boundaries and showed us that kindness is universal. Brothers and sisters, we shouldn’t only be kind to those of our own race and background. Our kindness towards others is part of our love for others, it is to be a love for all kinds of people.

Jesus showed kind compassion to a woman who had suffered from bleeding for 12 years. She came up behind Him and touched the edge of her cloak and He healed her with His power, saying “*Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace*” (Luke 9:48). He was kind. Jesus could have reprimanded the woman for touching Him. Since women were considered to have a lower status by many in those days, Christ could have easily “put her in her place.” Yet, he chose not to. He was kind instead. He called her daughter – a term of endearment. He understood her struggles and desperation, which led her to do what she did.

When Jesus was unkindly betrayed by Judas with a kiss, one of his disciples struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear (Luke 22:50). Jesus kindly said “*No more of this! And He touched his ear and healed him*” (v51). Even when He was hanging on the cross, Jesus expressed kindness towards His executioners, saying: "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34)

If anyone had a ‘right’ to be bitter, surely it was Christ. He suffered so much injustice during His life on this earth. However, Jesus is perfectly righteous and holy. He is the kindest person who has ever lived on this earth. Peter records the Lord’s kind character in these words: “*When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly*” (1 Peter 2:23). The greatest kindness of Christ was His laying down of His own life so that all of God’s people could be saved from sin and death.

Jesus said, “*My yoke is easy*” (Matt 11:30), the word ‘easy’ can also be translated ‘kind’ – “My yoke is kind”. Jesus is a kind Master. So whoever you are listen to His kind words of invitation: “*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy {kind}, and my burden is light.*" (Matt 11:28-30)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Lord has been kind, tender-hearted and forgiving towards you, will you then “*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you*”? This is one of the ways in which we can love one another just as Christ has loved us.

AMEN.