

The Good Samaritan: Accepting Kindness

A sermon by John L. Odhner, Bryn Athyn Cathedral, March 7, 2021

Kindness

Today is the final part of our series on kindness. The word “kindness” is related to the words “kin” and “kindred,” which have to do with family. In the beginning God created every plant, fish, bird and animal to reproduce according to its *kind* and then created human beings to reproduce according to their *kind*. The word “*humankind*” means the human family because we are all part of the same tribe; we are of the same kind. So “kindness” is “family-ness.” It’s treating someone as family. In the early Christian Church people gathered together in groups and ate together with love, and they thought of themselves as being part of a family where the Lord was their father and called one another brothers and sisters.

They called people “brothers” from love; or what is the same, from goodness. This manner of naming and addressing the neighbor comes from the fact that in heaven the Lord is the Father of all and loves everyone as His children, and so love is spiritual connection. From this all of heaven is like one family coming from love and charity. (Secrets of Heaven 2360)

All the bonds of mutual love in heaven resemble blood relationships and family ties and so resemble clans... In the Word, then, things that have to do with love or charity are depicted as households and clans. (Secrets of Heaven 1159)

When we sing “Brother (or sister), let me be your servant,” it means “let me serve you like you’re family, with kindness.” So on the subject of kindness we are considering today why it is sometimes hard to accept kindness from others, looking at the parable of the Good Samaritan. “Let me have the grace to let you be my servant, too.”

The lawyer

Jesus told this story after a lawyer tested Him with the question, “What must I do to have eternal life?” For the most part people at that time had lost the understanding of heaven embraced by the earliest peoples. Like many people of today, they spent more time arguing about who could get into heaven than they did letting heaven into their hearts. Yet the way to heaven was clearly taught in the Law (the Old Testament), so the Lord turned the question back to the lawyer—“How do you read the law?”

The lawyer replied that we must love the Lord and our neighbor, for the whole of the Word is about such love.

The Lord responded, “Do this and you will live” (eternally). It seems that the Lawyer understood the true teaching, but perhaps somewhere on the journey from embracing that ideal to practicing it he failed to have the compassion that his ideals demanded. In any case, The Lord’s teaching makes it abundantly clear that it is not knowing the Law but *doing* it that brings us into heaven. Perhaps this lawyer was the kind of person Paul addressed in Romans:

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law.... They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts.... Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? Romans 2:13-22

The lawyer then asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Perhaps he was thinking that those who have knowledge of the law were superior to those who do not, and therefore those were most his neighbor who shared his knowledge of the law, such as the priests and Levites (who were priests of the lowest degree).

Down from Jerusalem to Jericho

So the Lord told a parable about a man who traveled from Jerusalem down to Jericho. Jerusalem was the center of culture and religion for ancient Judea. The magnificent temple was there, patterned after a design the Lord showed Moses in heaven, thought of as God's dwellingplace on earth. In its most holy place was the Ark of the Covenant with the Ten Commandments, tables of stone inscribed by the finger of God himself, one table teaching us how to love God, and the other how to love our neighbor. Jews would come from all over to celebrate their great annual feasts in Jerusalem—the city where God's teachings had been brought down from heaven to earth.

Perhaps someone traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho had been on one of those visits that's certainly the journey was one that truly went down from Jerusalem near the center of the land on a mountain half a mile above sea level, down into the deepest valley on the face of the earth, over 800 feet below sea level. I have never been to Jerusalem, but I have been in that peak state of mind when I feel the presence of the Lord and gain a vision of the beauty and order of His divine truth. I have also experienced the difficulty of bringing those high ideals down into outward application. On a spiritual level we form a covenant with the Lord and promise to act with integrity and compassion, and then we have to figure out how to actually do that when the baby is crying, the boss is bossy, customers are complaining, the car won't start, the rent is due, the family is fighting, people are crazy and selfish and cruel, and how do you even get out of bed? The trip from Jerusalem to Jericho is the journey from inner, spiritual ideals to external daily life.

Attacked by thieves

The journey of regeneration always involves trials or temptations in which evil spirits attack our ideals and values and threaten to destroy our spiritual life. ‘

As soon as they become aware of something we love, no matter how small, or smell out anything dear and pleasing to us, they immediately attack and try to destroy it. (Secrets of Heaven 1820)

Angels constantly defend us and deflect the evil that the evil spirits intend against us. They even defend the falsity and evil we have in us, because they know very well where we obtained the falsity and evil: from evil spirits and demons. We never produce anything misguided or wicked out of ourselves. It is the evil spirits with us who produce it and at the same time cause us to believe that it comes from us. Such is their malevolence. What is more, at the same instant that they are filling us with these things and making us believe this way, they are also accusing and condemning us. (Secrets of Heaven 761)

For example you might start out your marriage with this euphoric hope for unity and bliss but somewhere along the road evil spirits attack and rob you of your compassion leaving you wounded by resentments. They steal your patience and hit you with frustration. You might start out a job with this hope that you're going to change the world or at least make a difference somehow, and yet along the way they rob you of your hopes when you're injured by corporate greed and politics.

On top of that the thieves strip us of our garments. Garments are truths. Not just true facts that we know, but the values, ideals, faith and positive thoughts that give us comfort, protection, and a sense of identity. Evil spirits strip these away from us, leaving us feeling worthless, ashamed, useless, hopeless.

The wounded church

Not only individuals but whole communities, churches and religions can fall among thieves on this downward path. Many religious groups start out as caring communities where people are genuinely kind and treat each other like family, but as time goes on they focus more and more on external rituals and keeping up appearances. Their initial kindness and love gradually fade away. This happened in ancient Israel. The Church hierarchy became increasingly focused on outward ritual and paying of tithes, and gradually neglected the weightier matters of the law—justice, compassion, and faith. (Matthew 23:23)

As a result when the Lord told this parable, the priesthood in the church had little love for the Lord, and the Levites had little love for their neighbor. In another parable, the Lord said that anyone who showed compassion to one of the least of His brothers or sisters who was sick or naked would be showing that same compassion to the Lord himself. But these religious leaders had no desire to get involved.

Because of religious leaders at that time had lost their compassion, the Lord while He was in the world began to set up his church anew, largely among gentile nations such as the Samaritans who still were able to have compassion on their fellow human beings. But the Christian church too in time lost its compassion.

It began to be infested and divided by schisms and heresies, and in the course of time to be torn and mutilated almost like what is said of the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. (True Christianity 378)

This is how the church is described in Isaiah:

They have forsaken the Lord... They have turned away backward.... You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. They have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment. (Isaiah 1:4-6)

Accepting help

If we recognize that all good is from the Lord and all evil is from hell, then we won't take credit for the good and feel superior to others, and we won't make ourselves guilty of the evil. The hells can attack our spiritual life by making us think either that we are so good that we don't need any help, or that we are so hopeless we don't deserve help. The priest and the Levite were as wounded and half-dead as the man lying in the road, but they could not recognize themselves in that man, so they could not be helped.

Feeling Compassion

For such a community—for such an individual, a good person feels compassion, as the Samaritan felt compassion for the wounded man. The Greek word for “feeling compassion” here is a little awkward, yet beautiful. *Splanchnidzomai*. It is literally a gut-wrenching, visceral reaction (Latin *visceribus commotus*) of sympathy when seeing someone in misery. It occurs 11 times in the New Testament. Eight occurrences describe the Lord's feeling of compassion when He sees people hungry, hurting, and lost. Three times it is used by the Lord himself in His parables—when the father of the prodigal son sees his son returning and runs to embrace him, when a master forgives a great debt owed by his servant, and in today's story when the Samaritan sees the wounded man. In these cases, the Lord is describing His own compassion for those who are suffering, for on a deeper level, the Lord is the Father who welcomes the wayward son, and the master who forgives his indebted servant, and also the Samaritan who helps the wounded man. For we have no intrinsic ability to feel compassion. Self-centeredness and pride would have us merely walk by on the other side. It is when we are touched by the Lord's own compassion for the human race that we can begin to feel compassion on one another.

Seeing

The Samaritan *saw* the wounded man, and likewise the Lord sees us. When the Lord said, “Surely, I have seen the affliction of my people” (Exodus 3:7) it means compassion, “for when the Lord sees anyone in misery, or in affliction, He has compassion on the person.” (Secrets of Heaven 6851) Likewise, the Lord has compassion on His church when He sees it in trouble. The Lord says in the Prophets to Jerusalem,

And when I passed by you and **saw** you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ ...but you were naked and bare... so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness.... “Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil, and I clothed you... Ezekiel 16:6-10

When Jesus **saw** the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)

The wounded man was unable to help himself. He could not dress his own wounds, or get up and walk to the inn. He was completely dependent on the Samaritan’s (and later the innkeeper’s) aid. The Lord wants us to recognize our need for Him, yet at the same time, He wants us to know that He helps us through other people.

God loves each and every human being; and because He cannot do good to them directly, but only indirectly by means of other people, He therefore breathes into people His love” (*True Christianity* 457)

Since all genuine compassion is from the Lord, when anyone has compassion on us, it is the Lord working in them and through them. You may have heard the story of a man who turned down several offers to help him escape a flood, saying, “I don’t need your help. I prayed to the Lord to save me.” Only when it was too late did he learn that the Lord had sent the rescuers.

So it is with all of us. We can feel that asking for help somehow lessens us, or that it’s too much of a burden on the other person, or that we will be obliged to return the favor. If we can remember that it is the Lord who is offering the help, we may recognize He has created us to need each other and help each other. By graciously accepting help, we allow the Lord to do His work in us and through us.

Lessons

Luke 10:25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 and He said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read *it*?”

27 So he answered and said, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

28 And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”

29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead.

31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. **32** Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. **33** But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. **34** So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. **35** On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave *them* to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' **36** So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Charity towards the neighbour holds within itself the desire that the neighbour will fare as well as oneself, and in the case of the angels the desire that he will fare better than themselves. Such is the nature of the affection that goes with charity. Consequently the affection that goes with charity loathes all idea of merit and so every good action done with a view to reward. Reward for people who have charity consists in their having the ability to do good, in being allowed to do it, and in the recipient's willing acceptance of it. This is the actual delight, indeed blessing, that is present with people with whom the affection that goes with charity exists. Secrets of Heaven 3956

John 15:5 "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. **6**... **7** If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you^l will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. **8** By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

9 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. **10** If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

11 "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.

12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.... **16** You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. **17** These things I command you, that you love one another.