

## **Love Is... Kind**

### **Genesis 21:22-27**

In the summer of 1972, I spent a day in a poor southern diner, in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by tobacco fields, in North Carolina. It was a day that changed me, and my ideas about black people, forever.

Some of you know that I grew up in Detroit, Michigan. Like most kids, I was shaped by the people and the places where I grew up. My neighborhood, my school, my church, my friends were all white. I remember sitting at my Grandfather's dinner table hearing his tales about work, and those he worked with. He didn't hold back on using the racial slurs that are forbidden today, but were part of everyday talk back in the 1960's and early 70's. That was a time of racial tensions, of the Civil Rights movement, desegregation, and busing. The riots in '67 in Detroit left large parts of the city burned to the ground, and there was still tension in the air. As a result, I had picked up all the derogatory words and phrases for African Americans.

In the summer of '72, my family drove our station wagon to Washington D.C., and the Norfolk Naval Base, on our way to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. We had rented a house close to the beach. Dad was driving, and it was a hot July night, dark, about 11:30 pm. We were in the middle of nowhere in North Carolina. He was taking the direct route, not the interstate. It was pitch black, on a 2-lane road, nothing but tobacco fields around. That's when the fan in the engine let loose and went through the radiator. We were stuck. Stranded.

In time a car came along and pulled over. Somehow 5 of us squeezed in and got a lift to the local hotel. The hotel manager had been asleep and he wasn't happy to see us. What a grumpy, mean old white guy. The room was awful! Smelled. Mom and Dad got the bed. We kids got the floor. There were bugs, and black mold up the concrete block walls.

The next morning, a tow truck finally came from Wilmington, about an hour away. It took the car and Dad went in the cab.

The rest of us needed a place to stay and wait and to get some food. We walked several miles, carrying luggage, to the nearest diner. It was a little place, on the side of the 2-lane. The diner was for colored only, and we were the only white folks in there.

There was one black man who ran the place, took the orders, and did the cooking. His brother served the food. And that black man who served the food was deaf.

The diner was pretty quiet that day. Not a lot of folks in and out. The deaf black waiter had a pad of paper, and we spent the day writing notes back and forth, getting to know each other as we talked by passing the paper back and forth, back and forth. We waited all day in the diner, drinking cokes, and talking through notes to a man we thought we should have feared. His kindness in caring for us and sharing was incredible!

Come to find out, he got his schooling at the Lutheran School for the Deaf in Detroit. And here we were Lutheran and from Detroit. It seemed like God arranged that we would meet that day. He was one of the nicest men I had ever met. That day was the first time in my young life that I learned not to look at the color of a person's skin, but to look deeper at the person. And it happened because someone I didn't expect to be welcoming or kind to us, showed warm hospitality. He gave us shelter and companionship when we needed it most, in rural North Carolina, on a hot, humid July day in '72.

In the Bible the word *chesed* is untranslatable. Its such a complex word. It means God's love for people. A love that is undeserved; love that's unexpected; love that is for enemies and rebels, but is extravagant nevertheless. Its love that is shown tangibly, physically, in concrete ways.

The phrase "loving kindness" was invented to try to translate the Hebrew word *chesed* into English.

In tonight's Old Testament story, *chesed* is what Abimelech asked of Abraham and showed to Abraham. And *chesed* – kindness – is what Abraham showed to Abimelech.

Abimelech was a Philistine king in Gerar. Abraham moved there and passed his wife Sarah off as his sister. Sarah was very good looking, and since the king thought she was single, he

decided to take her into his harem. But God revealed the truth to Abimelech in a dream before he ever touched her. So Abimelech returned Sarah to Abraham immediately. Abimelech felt wronged by Abraham's deception. When he asked Abraham why he had passed his wife Sarah off as his sister, Abraham's answer was not very diplomatic. Abraham explained "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'" Ouch! That's an insult!

Nevertheless, Abimelech showed kindness to Abraham, presenting him with gifts of sheep and cattle, slaves and silver to make up for his actions toward Sarah. If that weren't enough, he told Abraham that he could live anywhere that he wanted to in his territory. He was very generous to Abraham when he didn't really have to. In return, Abraham prayed for Abimelech and his household to be healed.

The deception by Abraham was the reason for Abimelech's words in our text. ***"Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you are living as an alien the same kindness I have shown to you."*** Abraham swore an oath to Abimelech that he would. But Abe immediately brought up an issue that he had about a well that had been seized by Abimelech's servants. Abimelech claimed he knew nothing about it, and Abraham accepted his explanation. He then gave gifts to Abimelech of sheep and cattle in order to seal the treaty between them.

This story is about two men who had every reason to despise and mistreat each other. It was a situation that could have resulted in them hating each other and feuding for years. That's the normal way people handle these kinds of situations. But these two men were able to come together by showing kindness to one another, under difficult circumstances. It teaches us that kindness can go a long way toward healing hurts and restoring love in a relationship.

The Bible tells us that God is love and that love is kind. So, when we rebelled against God, and broke our relationship with him by our sin, God responded with His loving-kindness in order

to restore us to Him. In Jeremiah 31:3 God says: ***“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”*** The loving kindness that God used to draw us back into relationship with Him was the love of Jesus our Savior.

God’s forgiving love for you is *chesed* love – kindness. God and you were 2 parties with real issues that divided you from Him. You were born into sin, but you keep on choosing sin, and selfishness, and rebellion. Every time you choose to do what YOU want instead of what God says is right, His way, you are actually telling God – in 4-letter words – to shut up and leave you alone. Every sin insults God to His face and every sin deserves that you be separated from Him forever ... in hell.

God, however, paid the price of that insult Himself. While we were still sinners, He gave up His very best, His most precious – He gave the life of His only Son. Jesus came to earth, lived sinlessly, endured ridicule, scorn and hatred. Jesus was innocent but intentionally went to a torturous death on a cross, and also took the wrath of God the Father for our sins. You talk about an extravagant, extravagant gift of kindness. His love poured out the very best for you and me, even when we are ungrateful and unkind to Him.

In the Bible, Paul describes God’s love in giving Jesus, and Paul says it is kindness – *chesed*. He wrote:

***But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)***

If this weren’t enough, God promises heaven to come. He invites you and me actually move in with Him forever and ever, so that He can be with us. God is that loving – a love beyond imagination. There in heaven God will bless you with every joy.

And on top of all this, God’s kindness showers you with blessings like food, house, family, work, the air you breath, the

beauty you see. On and On and On. We ought to be praising God all the time for his loving kindness in our lives.

In the Bible, Isaiah burst out in praise to God because of His goodness to us. He said, ***“I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord, the deeds for which He is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us—according to His compassion and many kindnesses.”*** (Isaiah 63:7)

God’s love is not limited to us. His love is so endless that He actually, really loves ALL people. And He wants all people to know and experience His loving kindness. God wants everyone to receive His greatest act of kindness in the forgiveness of Jesus. He wants everyone He has made to be with Him in heaven forever. Unfortunately, not everyone knows God’s love. Not everyone trusts in Jesus. Not everyone turns to God. So, God has a strategy.

Yes, God has a strategy to get people to discover His loving kindness. Do you know what God’s strategy is? God’s plan is that you show kindness on people – everybody, all the time. You shower kindness on others because of God’s kindness He first showered on you.

Jesus did this. In His 3-year ministry, Jesus sought out people who were rejected and ridiculed like prostitutes and tax collectors. And Jesus showed them that God accepts and forgives anyone who confesses their sin and asks for relief of a guilt-burdened heart.

Jesus went to a town of Samaritans – the people Jews loved to hate. There Jesus called a woman with a burden of shame to believe in Him. When she received new life, she told the whole town. And Jesus stayed with them several days, teaching and healing the sick.

Jesus touched an untouchable – a man with leprosy. He healed the daughter of a Syro-Phoenician woman. He cast out demons from a crazy man in a graveyard. He raised to life the daughter of a Roman Army officer.

Jesus said, ***“But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward***

***will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:35-36)***

The first Christians were known for their unusual, unexpected kindness. When pagan parents left their newborn child out in the forests to die of exposure or from wild animals, Christians took the children in and adopted them as their own.

When plagues spread through cities, the residents fled in fear, leaving their sick and dying relatives behind. It was Christians who went in, risked their lives, to care for the ill. The world noticed. They wondered, “Who DOES that sort of thing?” “What motivates them to show such loving kindness – even on strangers?”

Christians were the first to establish hospitals and orphanages and homes for the insane. Christians were the ones who worked tirelessly to end slavery.

Here in Cleveland, the old downtown Lutheran Churches 100 to 150 years ago were huge. Why did they attract so many people? It was their kindness that reflected the love of Jesus.

When immigrants arrived by boat in New York and thru the Erie Canal, they arrived in Cleveland. The Lutheran Churches welcomed the families. Put them up in an apartment. Gave them food. Then hooked them up with a job. They taught English, and the social skills they needed in America. In time they found them jobs in communities where Lutherans lived outside of Cleveland, and got them established in their new homes in America. It’s a story of amazing kindness.

Don Everts writes in his book, “The Hopeful Neighborhood,” about love in Henderson County Texas:

**In 2012, Jessica and some of her friends from church in Henderson County, Texas heard about a 63 year old local man who was in need. Financially. He had just learned that he had a detached retina and without the \$20,000 for surgery, he had resigned himself to impending blindness. No longer able to work as he used to, he was having difficulty paying his rent or even**

buying groceries for him and his wife.

It may not seem surprising that Jessica and her friends at church felt called to use the gifts and resources God had entrusted to them to help their neighbor in need. And they did-reaching out to him to find out what he needed and giving him money that people in their church donated. Nothing too surprising on the surface for a group of Christians who know they are created and called to pursue the common good in exactly this way. Not surprising unless you knew the particular 63 year old man in need.

Patrick Greene was an outspoken atheist who had been filing complaints and lawsuits for 30 years government officials of unconstitutionally endorsing Christianity. Earlier that same year, he had sued Henderson County. Arguing that they should remove the nativity scene that always graced the courthouse lawn in December each year. Everyone in Henderson County knew that Patrick was an outspoken atheist activist who saw Christians as “narrow- minded individuals who had treated him unkindly throughout his life.”

But this didn't keep Jessica or her friends from loving their neighbor. In fact, their initial gift wasn't the end of the story. Christians in the community got wind of this refreshing example of loving everyone always and chipped in as well, giving thousands of dollars to Patrick and his wife to help with their needs. If the community was shocked at this beautiful act of kindness, Patrick was flabbergasted, saying at one point, “I thought I was in the Twilight zone.” Being loved by his “enemies” had a tremendous effect on Patrick. He began sharing the story and stated at one point that he wanted to show his appreciation for Jessica and her friends' generosity by buying a star for the top of the Manger scene on the

**courthouse lawn! As Patrick put it, “I got all caught up in the excitement.... It's easy to do when you get ostracized and treated like garbage. When you're an atheist, you're Public Enemy No. 1. Jessica and her friends were simply doing what they are created and called to do: love everyone always- even “Public Enemy No. 1.” In our day and age, this is just as refreshing and surprising and beautiful as ever. (pages 100-101)**

Our sister congregation, Messiah Lutheran Church in Midland, Michigan operates an auto repair garage. They turn profits around into fixing cars and giving them to people who need a car to get to work so they can have a job to support their family.

The people of Messiah have branched out and bought an empty grocery store with all the refrigerators and freezers. They sell groceries at cost to working families who can't make ends meet. They serve the people who are waitresses, and cashiers at the gas stations. Cooks, and hotel maids. They are trying to support their families, but don't want government handouts that require them to remain poor and dependent.

The people of Messiah lavish kindness on people in the name of Jesus. You got to know that those who are curious and ask why they do this, are pointed to Jesus. His love is the reason why. All the church members are trained to pray with people on the spot, and explain what Jesus has done for them.

Love finds a way to be kind to another person, even when the other person is unkind to us. And when we practice this kind of love, we are showing the love of God.

Love is kind. You don't have to run a hospital, adopt a baby, or operate a grocery store to be kind. You can show God's loving kindness simply.

- Give someone a ride to their doctor whenever they need it.
- Visit a lonely senior citizen regularly.
- Welcome a new neighbor to the neighborhood and then invite them over to establish a friendship with them.
- Mow the lawn or shovel the snow for someone who is sick.



- Say kind supportive words to a co-worker who is going through a tough time.
- Offer to babysit for a single mom who is feeling frazzled and overwhelmed.
- Clean the house or do the laundry for someone who just got home from the hospital and can't lift things or climb stairs.

Whatever form kindness takes, God wants us to practice it as frequently and as faithfully as He has been kind to us.

God is love. His love is amazing. Love – His love in us-- is kind. Amen

