

“The Wisdom of Kindness”

3.29.20 - Rev. Laurel Gray

We had originally planned this service to be one of the events that started Westborough Connect’s Kindness Week - a town-wide event focused on promoting greater kindness in our community.

Our theme for the month has been wisdom, and when we started working on this service, the idea that kindness was wise seemed sort of abstract. Like it was something we’d really have to think about and not something that governed every aspect of our lives so profoundly and clearly.

Little did we know then where we would be now.

Kindness is the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate.
Wisdom is the good judgement born of knowledge and experience.

We are learning, or maybe remembering, that kindness is the wisest option. Life is showing us that being considerate of each other is the safest and most ethical path for us all.

Yesterday I called my seven-year-old niece to get her input for this service. I asked her what kindness was. She said kindness was when someone shares with you or invites you to play, helps you up if you fall down, and stands up for someone who’s getting bullied.

Then I asked her why it’s a good idea to be kind. She said simply that “it’s the right option. Like if you see someone fall down, the wrong option is ignoring it. The kind option is to help.”

There has perhaps never been a time in any of our lives when it became so universally clear that the right option is to help, that most sound judgement has us

act with a collective care for each other. That has always been true, but it has never before felt so imminent or obvious as it does now, as so many of us practice physical distance and stay home to slow the spread of Coronavirus.

Kindness to me is a deeper thing than being nice - it means something entirely different. Nice operates on the surface, it's about keeping up with appearances.

Kindness says: I will be a friend to you as you are; I will meet you in the truth; I will witness your pain and not look away; I will celebrate your joy with gladness; I will stand up for you when you need me to.

In a culture that celebrates busyness and wealth and GDP, that overlooks so much suffering and chooses profit over well-being, kindness has been marginalized.

But in the last few weeks, life as usual has been shut down. We as a society are trying to make different choices now, opting to close schools and churches, working from home, foregoing senior recitals and graduations - all of this is born of consideration for each other, born of the knowledge that our health and well-being is forever bound up in each other's health and well-being.

As Naomi Shihab Nye writes in today's reading:

“Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness...

Before you know kindness is the deepest thing inside,

You must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.

You must wake up with sorrow.

You must speak to it till your voice catches the thread of all sorrows and you see the size of the cloth.”

There is so much sorrow around us right now. Sorrow over all that has changed, all the people we miss, at the milestones and moments we've lost, sorrow for all those already sick or dying, sorrow over all the loss that could come.

As the poem continues, once you know sorrow as the other deepest thing,

“Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
Only kindness that ties your shoes and sends you out into the day
To mail letters and purchase bread,
Only kindness that raises its head from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
And then goes with you everywhere
Like a shadow or a friend.”

It is only kindness that makes sense anymore, and we are seeing it bloom all around us. In everyone staying home, in the doctors and nurses caring for the sick, in teachers putting classes online and cities singing together from balconies. It is a marvel to behold this abundance of kindness and courage and love amidst the fear and the grief and the sorrow.

Mr. Rogers, one of the great sages of our time, said that when he was a boy and would see scary things in the news, his mother would say to him: “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.”

May we have the wisdom to lead with kindness, to live with the awareness that we are all connected, and to do what we can to help.

Blessed be and amen.