



Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Week 1: Why Be Kind?

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. What thoughts and feelings do you have about winter?
3. Do you consider yourself a kind person? Why, or why not? What prompts you to kindness? What hinders you?
4. What three adjectives would you use to describe Jesus? Is "kind" one of them? Why, or why not?
5. Read the following stories in turn. For each one, ask yourself these two questions: i) Why do you think Jesus responds as he does? ii) What can we learn about kindness from this story?
 - John 2:1-11
 - Mark 10:13-16
 - Luke 5:12-16
 - Luke 22:47-53
6. What is your favorite story that demonstrates Jesus' kindness?
7. Read Colossians 3:12-14. What does this scripture tell us about our motivation for kindness?
8. Is there a situation or relationship in which you are currently finding it hard to be kind? If you are meeting with others, take some time to share briefly and then pray for one another. If you are reflecting alone, talk to God about this situation or relationship, and ask God to help you to be kind.

Prayer exercise for this week: Practicing Kindness like Jesus

Studies show that practicing kindness make people happier. Conduct an experiment this week to see if this is true for you. If not, the only "downside" will have been you've been kind like Jesus! Pick something to do each day that reflects the kindness of Jesus. For example:

- Bring joy to someone
- Be inconvenienced in doing kindness
- Help in a way that's menial
- Be kind to someone who seems underserving
- Do something kind in secret
- Make a personal connection with someone in need

Week 2: Just Kindness

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Read John 1:1-5 and discuss what this means to you. How is Jesus “the light of all people”? What does that look like in our reality generally? What significance does this have for you personally?
3. Read John 1:10-14. In what ways have you received the Light? What effect has this had in your life? In what ways have you rejected or avoided the Light? What are the reasons for this?
4. In the message on Sunday, we heard how in the struggle for justice we can at times feel tired, confused, afraid and even hopeless. How do you feel at the moment in your own journey? In what regard do you feel positive and hopeful? In what ways do you feel more despondent? Which of your current emotions (whether they feel good or bad to you) do you think are actually a product of the Light dwelling in you? Which of them might be due to you resisting the Light? How might a deeper union with the “Light of the World” affect this?
5. How do justice and kindness relate? Is it possible for kindness to be unjust? Is it possible for justice to be unkind?
6. Read John 17:20-23. How does Jesus’ teaching about love and unity (“oneness” with God, with Jesus, and with humanity) help us to be both just and kind? What difference could it make to how we view and relate to people—both our enemies and those for whom we naturally feel compassion?
7. If you are discussing these questions as a group, break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3 and share your reflections on question 3 above. What are some current ways in which you need to let the Light in? After sharing, spend some time praying for one another. If you are reflecting on these questions alone, take some time to quietly open your heart and welcome the Light.

Prayer exercise for this week: Practicing Oneness

Read the following quote from Thomas Merton in his book “Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander.”

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream. Not that I question the reality of my vocation, or of my monastic life: but the conception of “separation from world” that we have in the monastery too easily presents itself as a complete illusion: the illusion that by making vows we become a different species of being, pseudoangels, “spiritual men,” men of interior life, what have you.

Certainly these traditional values are very real, but their reality is not of an order outside everyday existence in a contingent world, nor does it entitle one to despise the secular: though “out of the world” we are in the same world as everybody else, the world of the bomb, the world of race hatred, the world of technology, the world of mass media, big business, revolution, and all the rest. We take a different attitude to all these things, for we belong to God. Yet so does everybody else belong to God. We just

happen to be conscious of it, and to make a profession out of this consciousness. But does that entitle us to consider ourselves different, or even better, than others? The whole idea is preposterous.

This week intentionally look at everyone you encounter as a fellow bearer of the Light, a child of God, and seek to love them as yourself. At the beginning of each day take a moment to center yourself and pray Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-23. Throughout the day, as circumstances play out such that you find yourself retreating back into the illusion of separateness, return to this prayer and start over again.

Week 3: Kindness Keeps Company

1. Was there anything that resonated with you in the message this past Sunday? Was there anything you disagreed with or found unhelpful?
2. Share a story about a time someone was unexpectedly kind to you. What impact did this have on you? Why did it affect you this way?
3. Read John 1:14. What does this verse teach us about the kindness of God?
4. Have there been times in your life when you have found it difficult to “rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15)? Why do you think that was the case?
5. Read John 4:1-30. This is a well-known story with many layers of meaning.
 - What does it tell us about the kindness of Jesus?
 - On Sunday, we looked at four things Jesus did: he dwelt (was interruptible), embraced oneness, listened with kindness, and shared his own story and life.
 - Which of these four things comes easiest to you?
 - Which do you find the hardest to do?
 - How might you grow in that area?
6. Think about a situation or a relationship in your life in which you could show more kindness. What is stopping you from being “kinder than necessary”? If you are discussing these questions as a group, take some time to listen to each other with empathy, and then pray for one another to be more like Jesus in showing kindness. If you are reflecting on these questions individually, talk to God about the situation, knowing that you are not alone: God hears and understands.

Prayer exercise for this week: Practicing Listening

Does your life in Christ give you strength? Does his love comfort you? Do we share together in the spirit? Do you have mercy and kindness? If so, make me very happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and having one mind and purpose. When you do things, do not let selfishness or pride be your guide. Instead, be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. Do not be interested only in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others.

Philippians 2:1-4 (NCV)

At the beginning of each day, ask God to open your eyes, ears and hearts to those around you. In your interactions with others, try to slow down. Make time to listen to what people tell you, and ask God to use you to bring God’s loving presence to each situation.

Although obvious, we often forget that it is helpful when listening to

- De-center yourself—focus on their story rather than relating it back to your own.
- Be non-judgmental—acknowledging another’s feelings and perspective does not mean you agree, but that you value them as fellow children of God.
- Be present in the moment—put aside distractions, and focus your thoughts on the conversation.
- Don’t try to “fix” them—recognize they are competent people who can work their way through issues.

- Respond with grace and truth—believing the best of others, and bringing God’s kindness to the situation.

Week 4: Kindness Forever

1. Was there anything that seemed timely to you in the message this past Sunday? Was there anything you thought was confusing or unhelpful?
2. Think about a time you hesitated to be kind, but were later really glad you were. What was the reason you hesitated? What does this reason (or the reasons of the group collectively) tell us about how we typically view the world? Why do you think we view the world in this way?
3. Read the ancient story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, found in Genesis 3:1-24. What aspects of this story reflect how we typically view God, each other, and the world today? How do these views show up in our everyday lives?
4. Read Matthew 5:43-48 and Matthew 6:25-34. Reflect on the following:
 - How does Jesus challenge our view of God, each other, and the world?
 - What aspect of these teachings do you find most difficult at this point in your life?
 - What do these verses tell us about the kindness of God?
 - What do they tell us about our own need to be kind?
5. Read Matthew 5:38-42. What might these verses tell us about the power of love in the face of aggression?
6. Reflect back on the series as a whole.
 - Is there an area of your life where you feel God is challenging you to be kinder?
 - Is there something in your worldview (your beliefs about God, other people, or the world) that is making it difficult for you to be the kind and loving person you were created to be?

If you are discussing these questions as a group, take some time to share your responses and pray for each other. If you are reflecting on these questions individually, talk to God about your responses.

Prayer exercise for this week: Practicing a New Perspective through the Lord's Prayer

Take time this week to immerse yourself in the words of the Lord's Prayer, and ask God to help you take on a more hopeful, loving perspective. You can find a mediation of the Lord's Prayer here: https://youtu.be/Y_6eMKBPYw8 Alternatively, read through it slowly yourself below.

Take a few deep breaths.

Pay attention to your breathing and allow your mind to grow quiet.

Enjoy this time of stillness as we focus on the words of the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, may Your name be honored.

Picture yourself coming into the light of God's presence.

Let this light wash over you, and through you.

In your mind's eye, look around you and see the multitudes:

All of humanity gathered as one.

All of us, children of the one God, bathed in the light of divine love.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Now see this light, this loving presence flooding the earth.

See it cleansing and healing all of creation.

The kingdom of God, the will of God, lived out among us,

So the earth becomes an extension of heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Reflect for a moment on God's abundant provision for you.

What are you grateful for in this moment?

Set us free from our debts as we have set free our debtors.

Focus again on the light of God's presence.

Feel the warmth of it melt away any shadows of guilt and shame.

You are loved and you are forgiven.

As the light passes through you, let go of any bitterness or resentment you are holding onto.

God wants you to be free.

And to be free, you need to forgive; you need to let go.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Imagine yourself in a cocoon of light, protected from the anger, greed and lust of the world.

God's love holds you.

You are a child of light.

For Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.

The light of God shines in the darkness, and the darkness will never overcome it.

Love is stronger than fear; life has conquered death.

Take a deep breath and sit for a moment in an attitude of praise and gratitude to the God of Light.

Amen