

“A Daily Dose of Kindness”

Proverbs 21:21-31; Colossians 3:12-17

January 28, 2018

Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

I read the Sunday comics about as faithfully as I go to Sunday church, which is to say that I read the comics every week. I have done so, for as long as I can remember: Beetle Bailey, Dennis the Menace, Blondie and Dagwood, Peanuts. The comics teach me.

I identify with none of them, in my advancing age, better than with “Pickles”, created by award-winning cartoonist Brian Crane. It has been happily added to my essential reading regimen because “Pickles” features a 70-something grandpa, Earl, trying his best to manage life in a changing world--frumpy, old-fashioned, occasionally clueless. That is close to how my children and grandchildren might describe me.

In one encounter, Earl’s little grandson Nelson revealed that he had been dreaming about porpoises. Grampa asked why. Nelson said that when his mother, Earl’s daughter, kisses him goodnight, she always says: “Fall asleep with a dream, and wake up with a ‘porpoise’”. It bothers Nelson that he never wakes up with a “porpoise”. Earl considered the problem, and suggested to Nelson that his mother probably rather says that he should wake up with a “purpose”...not a “porpoise”! Little Nelson declares that it would be more fun to wake up with a “porpoise”. The comic strip ends when experienced Grandpa Earl admits: “Good point!”

But in fact, Nelson’s mother seems to be on point. Studies have shown that having a higher purpose in life helps a person live longer and healthier, and keeps the mind sharper.

Waking up with a purpose—living with a purpose—is something that virtually every major world religion would advocate. Each offers a prescription that, when followed, leads to spiritual fulfillment.

Christianity shares roots with Judaism, so for both religions, the Book of Proverbs, with its multitude of prescriptions, is a good start for how to live a life of purpose. For example: *“Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor.” (Proverbs 21:21)* This is viewing life and self from God’s perspective: Righteousness, and **Kindness**.

Christianity’s tireless ambassador Paul, in a letter to his faithful brothers and sisters in ancient Colossae, amplifies this prescription for a life of spiritual fulfillment: *“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, **kindness**, humility, meekness, and patience...Clothe yourselves in love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”* This, again, is viewing life and self from God’s perspective: Compassion, and **Kindness**.

Mother Teresa, who has been promoted for sainthood in the Roman Catholic tradition, captured the idea of human kindness as a reflection of God when she said: *“Be the living expression of God’s kindness: Kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting.”* In you, let people know God’s face...God’s eyes...God’s smile...God’s warm greeting.

Be a daily dose of **kindness**! Wake up with a “porpoise”! Live with a “porpoise”!

During a recent winter, brand new tents were being dropped off at the makeshift camps for homeless people throughout our metropolitan area. At first, no one knew who was delivering the tents, but people in the camps were a lot warmer, and getting a lot better sleep out in the elements. It turns out that the “mystery angel” was Arnold Harvey, who grew up in a family of 12 kids in the worst part of Kansas City. He promised God that if his life got better, he would help others. His life got better. As a sanitation worker, he drives a Waste Management truck on an early morning route. He saw rats crawling on homeless folks asleep along the streets. He decided to do something. With his wife, Arnold formed a small charity that collects donations of sleeping bags, clothes, shoes, and food that he takes

along on his route. He has been honored by Fortune Magazine. (*Whoever pursues kindness will find life and honor*).

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Being kind means being nice, yes, but at times it can mean more than that. Being kind doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re a soft touch. Take Katherine Slover of Potomac, for example. She was on the shore at White’s Ferry when the underwater cable of the ferry snapped, leaving the boat adrift on the river, with a dozen cars and 20 passengers aboard. (*Remember this near tragedy?*)

The captain frantically yelled for help, and Katherine forged her own path through fallen timber and across a creek to where she could grab the rope that the captain hurled to the river bank. At his instruction, she wrapped the rope line around a couple of sturdy trees, and that kept the ferry from floating helplessly downriver.

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On work-related travel to a country in South America, Laurie Ahern witnessed what she considered to be unacceptable treatment of children trapped in institutions. Vowing “I couldn’t turn my back on what I had seen,” she is now president of Disability Rights International, whose worldwide mission is to close orphanages by finding safe, loving homes for children without families. Ahern’s kindness is motivated in part by the history of ill-treatment she suffered while growing up. “I might not save every child that I see,” she says, “But maybe I can prevent this for the next generation.” Laurie Ahern is a recipient of a “Purpose Prize”, awarded by the nonprofit Encore.org.

Be a daily dose of kindness! Wake up with a “Porpoise” Prize! Live with a “porpoise”!

Elizabeth Ottaway’s son Alexander was born prematurely, and never recovered from an undeveloped esophagus and other complications. Elizabeth says, “The neonatal intensive care unit at

Children's National Medical Center was Alexander's only home. The love and care we got while he was there make us want to give back to that community." She knows what the parents of struggling babies are going through at the Center, so she is a valued member of the Center's parent advisory council. She organizes bake sales that benefit the families, and blood drives that benefit the babies. She comforted one of Alexander's nurses when the nurse herself lost her premature baby. An amateur photographer, Elizabeth takes photos of the babies in outfits appropriate to each season, and gifts the photos to the families. "It's healing for us" Elizabeth says of the volunteer work that she does with her husband at the Center. "By helping people who are in similar situations, it is a way of honoring Alexander's memory."

Be a daily dose of kindness! Wake up with a "Porpoise" Prize! Live with a "porpoise"!

Some of us frumpy, old-fashioned, occasionally clueless baseball fans enjoyed watching Yogi Berra, as an All-Star catcher and manager, lead the New York Yankees to World Series after World Series. Over the years, Yogi became just as famous for his hapless nuggets of wisdom, like "It ain't over till it's over". When he was asked: "How do you like school?" Yogi answered: "Closed!" Fame did not keep Yogi from being kind. His annual golf classic raised money for kids with special needs. During the event, Yogi drove kids around the golf course, introducing them by name to the celebrity golfers. The peerless life of Yogi Berra, who said "Always go to other people's funerals; otherwise, they won't go to yours", ended, appropriately, at the close of a recent baseball season.

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Through you, let people know God's face...God's eyes...God's smile...God's warm greeting.

It will keep your mind sharper. It will help you live healthier. It will help you live longer.