

**Cultivating Kindness**  
**Micah 6:8; Colossians 3:12**  
**Hyattstown Christian Church**  
**August 2, 2020**

I am being trained to be an “enumerator” by the 2020 Census Bureau. I’ll be visiting households that have not yet replied to the federal government’s request to be included in the survey of the American population that is updated every 10 years.

At a training session in Hagerstown last Monday, a gentleman in my small group of six asked if any of us would give him a lift back to Montgomery County. One woman was engrossed in technology problems, and did not even hear the request. It was immediately apparent that the other woman in our group was not interested in having a strange man share her car. Two other men mumbled answers that were anything but welcoming.

It was yours truly who replied readily in the affirmative: “Where do you live? I’ll be happy to have you ride with me!”

“Can you get me to a Metro Station?”

“Sure!”

Kim and I talked for the entire hour to Shady Grove. Later that evening, my “inbox” smiled with his effusive gratitude: “1000 thanks!” Kim said.

The next morning I rose early to pay respects to Congressman John Lewis, whom I have been privileged to know personally. Mind you, hundreds of thousands of Americans are saying that today—that’s the kind of man he was. Around 8:00 a.m., I found the end of the line wrapped around behind the Supreme Court, and fell in it right behind a young woman wearing a red Washington Nationals hat. TOO

close behind her, as it turned out! She immediately motioned to me to “back off!” Not once, but twice! We were all wearing masks, and social distancing—six feet apart—but she must have been a card-carrying member of the Pandemic Police!

I figured out, thanks to the sun rising from the east, that the long shadow of my body was about 12 feet. So, for a time, using that measurement, I avoided the woman’s demonstrative reprimands. When we got closer to the Capitol, we found that small yellow circles had been spray-painted on the passage ways, six feet apart. For that hour, moving back and forth along the metal barriers lining First Street, I kept an extra yellow circle between the two of us. But, with every movement forward, the young woman ahead of me in the red Washington Nationals hat would plant both of her feet squarely on a yellow circle, and turn her head to the side to make sure with peripheral vision that I was honoring pandemic protocols.

Monday in Hagerstown—Tuesday on Capitol Hill: Contrast in Cultivating Kindness.

At the steps of the U S. Capitol, below the flag-draped casket of John Lewis, I gave thanks for the life of one of the kindest persons America has produced. That description of him was uttered as frequently as any other during the services in his honor over five days: John Lewis was a kind man!

A survey of our Bible leaves no doubt that any believer who seeks God’s favor would do well to practice “kindness”, almost above any other attribute. It is as if “kindness” by its nature inevitably evokes those other desirable, God-like attributes.

More than 700 years before Jesus’s birth, Micah warned that Judah south of Jerusalem would meet the same fate as had Judah north of Jerusalem, if people didn’t shape up. Micah’s prophesy swings between images of judgement and images of hope. Unheeded warnings may well result in destruction. But, because of God’s kindness and faithful love, hope and renewal will follow the disaster.

So, what does the Lord require of you? “To do justice, to embrace kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

Then, there is the Apostle Paul, some years after Jesus’s death, imploring the church at Colossae, which he had never visited, to stay true to Christ as God’s savior of the world. The Colossians had begun to tinker with the faith, flirting with other religious expressions. From prison in Rome, Paul listed what they would need in order to resist falling from the faith: compassion, kindness—there it is—humility, gentleness, patience. This reads as a reiteration of his message to the Corinthians, whom Paul had personally known: “Love is patient and kind”—there it is!

I agree with those who say that cultivating kindness is exactly what we need right now, as an effective antidote to the fear, distrust, isolation that accompanies a relentless pandemic. In a Washington Post “Perspective” last month, Stephen Petrow insists that “kindness toward others—even ourselves—has been shown to help balance seesawing emotions, which we all have these days, and even possibly improve some health outcomes.” He goes on: “It’s worth noting that, even as it feels like darkness and struggle are ratcheting up, people are reaching out to others to help, even if they don’t dominate the news.”

--Members of a historically black fraternity cleaned up Atlanta streets after a night of protest and violence.

--A homeowner in Washington DC opened his door to dozens of marchers fleeing police who were scattering them with chemical agents.

--Bystanders pulled a fallen blind man to safety from an oncoming Metro train

--Muslim volunteers roving town in a bus gave refuge to dozens of Toronto’s homeless during days of inclement weather.

Ken Burns, the documentarian advises: “If anybody tells you there is a ‘them’, walk away. There is no ‘them’. Only ‘us’. We have an opportunity with this crisis to reset—to get away from knee-jerk divisions.”

Cultivate kindness!

Tran Ngoc Than, a Vietnamese soldier and politician, an influential American ally, was imprisoned for “treason”, in a communist re-education camp, after the war. American officers had considered Tran the most knowledgeable Vietnamese on how to defeat the communist insurgency. He was an outspoken critic of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, whom Tran accused of corruption. Thieu had his old army friend imprisoned again.

Released in 1978, Tran, his wife, and children fled as refugees to Malaysia, and ultimately to Los Angeles. Thieu, meantime, the former President, had settled with his wife in Boston. Despite their falling out during the conflict and confusion of a volatile war winding down, the two couples resumed their former friendship in the 1990’s. They simply agreed: “The past is past.” Mr. Tran died of COVID-19 complications on June 17. The reconciliation of the Vietnamese leaders was featured in—guess what—a documentary by Ken Burns! “There is no ‘them’. Only ‘us’.”

Once friends. Once enemies. Once friends again. Cultivating kindness!

You may never guess where kindness might lead! Near the end of our conversation last Monday, my hitchhiking friend Kim mentioned that he had been a journalist for AARP’s monthly newspaper. I exclaimed: “You knew my high school buddy Jim Toedtman!” Jim was for years AARP’s editor. “Knew him?” Kim reported excitedly. “Jim was my boss!”

You may never guess where a little kindness might lead!

Just beware of a young woman wearing a mask and a red Washington Nationals hat!