

# KINDNESS 2

9/17/17

Rev. Ray Andersen

Some of you here this morning may have heard my first sermon on kindness and just when you thought it was safe to come back to church, kindness, like the shark in Jaws, has circled around and is coming back for a second bite.

This morning I'd like to explore the connection between kindness and honesty. Can honesty go hand in hand with kindness? At first glance you might think the two are incompatible. Let's admit that telling the truth is not easy. Honesty can be uncomfortable and provide a harsh dose of reality. I know this because my wife, the lovely Mrs. Andersen, critiques my sermons, my eating habits, and the things she wished I didn't say. This truth telling sometimes feels like the old subtle sledge of reality—not often easy, not often kind.

She's actually practicing tough love, which is honesty and kindness working together.

Is it better at times to slap a hand than hold it? Is it sometimes kind to be cruel? In other words, is honesty always the best policy? Does genuine kindness mean being ready to tell the uncomfortable truth? I have a sign in my man cave which reads, "Studies have shown women who carry a little extra weight live longer than the men who mention it." Truth telling statements like "that dress makes you look fat" or "your fly is open" or "you're being childish" may be truth-telling and difficult to say, but is also difficult to hear.

They said of Jesus, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances." Jesus was a truth teller and look where it got him. Truth telling can be embarrassing, it can make the receiver uncomfortable, especially if the truth teller flunked Diplomacy 101 and is less than tactful.

Can honesty and kindness coexist? Must we choose? A well-known evangelical preacher, Warren Wiersbe, said "Truth without kindness is brutality, and kindness without truth is hypocrisy." To be kind, to show love for another, we must be honest, and in being honest a little kindness can go a long way. Kindness and honesty must go together—you can't have one without the other.

I want to say one other thing about kindness and honesty. We often hide our kindness because we're not honest with ourselves. Perhaps this applies to men more than women. We all know men and women are trained from childhood on, encouraged to follow certain accepted behavioral norms. I won't even think of saying anything on how women are conditioned to behave. Oh no, that way trouble lies. The original Mrs. Andersen didn't raise no dummies.

But I do know about men. With us it's big boys don't cry, be tough, never show weakness, never let 'em see you sweat, never look foolish, fool me once shame on you fool me twice shame on me, lookout for No. 1. Being raised with this sort of baggage one tends not to get involved with other people's problems, to keep one's distance, maintain a reserve. What this leads to is me shutting off the flow of kindness that lives within me. Yes, Virginia, there is a well of kindness in us all.

I cannot deny, as you cannot deny, we are all hardwired to be kind, to be altruistic. There is a deep reservoir of kindness in every person, yet we all too often keep it hidden. We stop ourselves from using it. We are in effect not honest with ourselves. Our tenderness, our good will, our extended hand of friendship, our human warmth, our willingness to give and to help are often blocked by the proscription don't get fooled, don't be taken in, don't get involved. We become cynical, "why bother it won't help anyway." We're afraid to be vulnerable, to take a chance, to risk being kind. So we miss experiencing the joys of the beautiful, uplifting, spiritually saving ways of kindness.

I fear looking foolish, being taken in, being weak or exposed. But if I embrace honesty, honesty with myself about my God-given nature to be kind, it can keep me drinking from the deep well of kindness lying hidden within.

In the words of this book's author, "We don't have to do anything to be kind, because we already are kind. We have only to give ourselves permission to be so."

And in the words of St. Paul, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." And in the words of Jesus, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Let me end with words from the gospel of Bert Bacharach, a song, from the movie "Alfie."

*What's it all about Alfie?*

*Is it just for the moment we live...*

*Are we meant to take more than we give*

*Or are we meant to be kind?*

*And if only fools are kind*

*Then I guess it is wise to be cruel...*

*I believe in love...*

*When you walk let your heart lead the way.*