

Sermon for Sunday, October 22, 1972 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"THE MIRACLE OF KINDNESS"  
Ephesians 4:17-32

Text: "...And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:32

Several Sundays ago I preached a sermon entitled, "How To Get Along With People." The passage of scripture I used that day (Matthew 18:15-22) gave several rules for relating to other people. The last rule that Jesus laid down in that passage was the principle of forgiveness. When every other thing fails in trying to relate to another person, you always have left to you the resource of forgiveness.

Yet, I came away from that sermon feeling that somehow it was not quite complete. The sermon was fine as far as it went, but something was missing. Several days later I was reading the book of Ephesians and came to the passage that I have read for our scripture for this morning. Suddenly it dawned on me what had been missing in the previous sermon. The first sermon dealt basically with changing my attitude toward another person. What it left out was dealing with changing the other person's attitude toward me. So, this morning I want to add that missing dimension to the sermon on getting along with people. You see, it is very important to deal with my own emotions, the attitudes of my own heart, the thoughts that grip my own mind. Yet, it is also terribly important to deal with the attitudes and feelings and emotions of the other person. And the Christian must not only ask himself how he is dealing with his own attitudes, but he must go one step further. He must ask himself what he is doing to try to change the attitudes in the heart of the other person. Our text for this morning gives us the clue, it gives us the miracle principle by which we can be used by God to help change another man's heart.

The first point I want to make is this: You can't practice this miracle principle if you are not a Christian. You have to be born again, a new creation, or, as St. Paul puts it, you have to be "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

St. Paul describes the persons who can't practice this principle. He says they are darkened in their understanding. He says they are alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. He says they have become callus and have given themselves up to licentiousness. He says they are greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. And that's St. Paul's description of the non-Christian. But, he says, the Christian is different from that. He says the Christian has put off his old nature which belongs to his former manner of life. He says the Christian has put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God.

So the first question we need to ask ourselves is whether or not we qualify to practice the miracle principle we are going to talk about. Before you can practice it, you have to be a Christian. People wonder why there is so much strife and turmoil in the world today. There is strife between the young and the establishment between black and white; between the haves and the have nots; between nation and nation. And the reason is because most people simply are not Christians. They are not qualified to practice the miracle principle. Only the man who has a new nature, created after the likeness of God, can do that.

The second point I want to make is that even when you are a Christian it is tough to act like one! I know I find this true in my life and I'm sure you do, too. We keep slipping back into the old nature. People have the idea that the church ought

to be free from strife and turmoil. People have the idea that the church ought not to have problems and disagreements. People have the idea that the fellowship in the church ought to be perfect. But the fact is, it just doesn't work that way. The reason it doesn't is because of the kind of people who make up the church.

Look, for example, at the church at Ephesus. Sometimes we think things in the days of the Bible were perfect, but it just isn't so! St. Paul writes, "putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor." So the Ephesian church had some liars in it. St. Paul said, "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." So, the church had some hot-heads in it. St. Paul said, "Let the thief no longer steal." So the congregation had some thieves in it. He said, "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths." So they had some foul-mouthed members. He said, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away, with all malice." And that doesn't sound like a very happy bunch. So how could a group of people like that--lying, thieving, evil speaking, angry, bitter men--have any sort of fellowship together?

So the first point I made is that only Christians can practice the miracle principle and the second point I have made is that because we Christians are the kind of people we are, we can't get along with each other unless we do practice the miracle principle.

The third point I want to make is that the miracle principle we add to forgiveness that lets us be used of God to help change another person's heart is the principle of kindness and tenderheartedness. That's what St. Paul says in our text for today. First he describes what a person is like without Jesus. Second he describes what terrible kinds of people Jesus pulls together in the body of the church to make into the new creatures. Third, he tells us the only way people like that can get along. He writes, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

What does it mean to be kind and tenderhearted? It means to love and accept another person just as he is. It means to acknowledge the basic worth and dignity of another as a fellow human being. It doesn't matter who he is, what he has done, what he is like--Jesus died for that person; God loves that person right where he is and just as he is; and God not only wants us to be forgiving towards that person, he wants us to exercise the miracle principle, he wants us to be kind and tenderhearted.

Jesus always had time to be kind and tenderhearted. When a sick woman reached out just to touch the hem of his robe, he had time to stop and heal her. When a blind Bartemaeus cried out to Jesus even when he had been told to be quiet, Jesus stopped to minister to him in loving tenderness. We have been reading a lot in the papers lately about how charity patients are treated in one of our city hospitals. And what are those people saying to us? They are saying, "Just because we are black, or poor, or dirty, or sick, or uneducated, or whatever, you are not treating us as persons of worth--you are not acting with kindness and tenderheartedness."

I read a story not long ago about a sick old man who had to go to a charity clinic for medical aid. There he was treated by the young interns. Some time later he inherited some money and he chose one of the young interns as his physician--on a paying basis this time. The young doctor asked him why he had been picked from all the doctors who had treated the old man. He replied, "Because you always helped me with my coat." It was an act that said, "You matter. You are a person of worth." C. E. Albertson in a little poem, expresses it this way:

"Sometimes in folk around me  
With burdens, hurts and fears;  
Through joyful, happy hours  
And often through their tears;

In some loving act of kindness  
As they show how much they care  
In the lives of folks around me  
I find God reflected there.

Yes, forgiveness changes the attitude in my heart towards you. But the miracle principle--the principle of kindness and tenderness--the principle that says, "I love you. I accept you as a person of worth."--is the principle that can change your attitude towards me. You see, when Jesus touches a life and changes it, and when that changed life reaches out in kindness to touch another life, that life, too, can be transformed. See how it works!

It took place in New York during the Second World War at the old Collegiate Church which had a canteen for service men. One Saturday night the hostess pointed out to the minister, Joseph Sizoo, a young sailor dressed in the uniform of the Royal Navy of England. He stood alone by an open window, staring blankly out into the night. His body was stiff and tense, his hands knotted into tight fists. The minister exercised the miracle principle and went over to talk to the young man. Soon his story came pouring out. "I grew up in St. Ives," he said, "with a girl who lived next door. Her name was Janie. Her folks were friends of my folks, and we all thought a lot of each other. When the war came, I went to sea. I have seen a lot of war down in the South Pacific. One day I wrote Janie a letter and asked her if she would marry me. She wrote right back and said she would. So, we made plans, and finally I got back to Cornwall with five days' furlough--all our own. We had a very pretty ceremony in the church we always went to. There was to be a high tea at Janie's hour after the ceremony and then we were going off by ourselves for the rest of my furlough. But first I had a job to do. Things were a bit snarled up and it was my duty to report to the Admiralty Office that I was in town. The first chance I had was right after the wedding service, so I went down to the office and registered. Then I started back for Janie's house. It wasn't there."

In the interval of silence the minister could hear the ticking of his wrist watch. "There was only a hole in the ground. The Germans had come over. The house was gone, and so was Janie and her folks and mine. Nobody was left even to bury."

For a long time the two stood there, the minister with his head bowed silently asking God to help him know what kind thing to do, what tenderhearted thing to say. "Did you ever have much to do with the church?" "Yes, I used to sing in the choir." "What was your favorite?" "I think it must be, 'Lead, Kindly Light.'" The minister cleared his throat and began to sing, "Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on; the night is dark, and I am far from home, lead thou me on." Together they sang that night--hymn after hymn--until finally the tears came and the tense young body relaxed.

Yes, there is so much lostness, so much tragedy, so much sorrow, so much loneliness, so much pain. All around are those who need the miracle principle--people who need a life transformed by Jesus to reach out and touch them with tender kindness--a touch that says, "I love you. You are a person of worth." Yes, "...And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."