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Kindness

I remember years ago watching an episode of “Everyone Loves Raymond.” If you don’t remember the show, Ray was a father about my age who lived right next to his somewhat overbearing parents. One year, he and his brother were trying to decide what to get their mother for mother’s day. This was kind of hard, because she was never really happy with any gift she received. Finally, she told them that all she ever wanted was two good boys.

And I remember years ago listening to radio psychologist Dr. Laura, who helped her callers deal with family issues. One of her lines that I heard more than once was that if your greatest wish for your kids is that they grow up to be happy, you are not wishing for enough. She taught that the greatest thing we can wish for is that they grow up to be kind.

Or as my Mom used to tell me and my brothers all the time, “Two wrongs don’t make a right.” In other words just because someone has been mean to you doesn’t give you permission to be mean to them show them kindness instead.

This is a principle that Jesus, the mother hen who wanted to gather all of God’s children under his wing taught to his disciples. Jesus put it this way, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. But love your enemies, do good to them and lend to

them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.”

There is a meme that was going around facebook and Instagram for a while that said something like, “I don’t care if your short, tall, fat, skinny, rich or poor. If you’re nice to me. I’ll be nice to you. Simple as that.” It’s attributed to Eminem. This is how the world shows kindness. If you are nice to me I’ll be nice to you. Christians are called to a deeper kindness. A sacrificial kindness.

When David was just a teenager he was he was anointed to be Israel’s next King. King Saul was jealous and set out to kill David at least 6 different times. King Saul even tried to convince his son Jonathon to kill David. But Jonathon and David were best friends. It would benefit Jonathan if David was dead because Jonathan was next in line to inherit the Kings throne. But David and Jonathan were best friends and made an agreement- a covenant of kindness between 2 friends. We Read about it in 2 Samuel 20:13 where Jonathan says to David, “If my father intends to harm you, may the Lord deal with Jonathan, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away in peace. May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father. But show me unfailing kindness like the Lord’s kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed and do not cut off your kindness from my family – not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth.”

Fast forward many years. Saul and Jonathan were both dead and David was King. David was on the throne and no longer in hiding. David had every reason to sit back and enjoy victory, but something bugged him. He had a memory of e promise to Jonathan to show kindness to the

household of Saul. And so David asks his servants, “Is there anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” No one in the King’s court can remember where any of Jonathan’s family is. When the mighty fall the fall is mighty. But someone does remember a servant in Saul’s household named Ziba. And so Ziba is called to the King’s court, but before he leaves he kisses his wife and family goodbye thinking that David wants to settle the score. After all Ziba had worked for the losing king. But David didn’t want to settle the score. He wanted to show kindness.

The servant Ziba says, “There still is a son of Jonathan; his is lame in both feet.” This son of Jonathan named Mephibosheth would have inherited the crown, but now he is crippled living in a place called LoDebar – which means Living without Pasture. Mephibosheth can’t walk. He is living in an impoverished place. He has lost the throne, his family, his ability to provide and protect.

But then the kindness of the King happened. David could have sent money or a messenger over to LoDebar. David could have said, “I’m gonna put you on my prayer list.” Instead David brings Mephibosheth to live in Jerusalem and eat at the King’s table every day. David did more because kindness does more.

In American Culture there is this ideal that is held and I see Memes about it all the time on facebook that say “No Regrets.” We want to live with no regrets. But David obviously regretted not keeping his promise to Jonathan.

Author Brene Brown who has a PHD in sociology and has done much research on shame and regret. Rights this in her book Rising Strong, “Regret is a tough but fair teacher. To live

without regret is to believe you have nothing to learn, no amends to make and no opportunity to be brave with your life.”

One of the truest things I’ve ever learned about regret came from George Saunder’s 2013 commencement address at Syracuse University. He talked about how when he was a child, a young girl was teased at his school and, although he didn’t tease her and even defended her a little, he still thought about it. He said, “So here’s something I know to be true, although it’s a little corny, and I don’t quite know what to do with it. What I regret most in my life are failures of kindness. Those moments when another human being was there, in front of me, suffering and I responded...sensibly. Reservedly. Mildly.”

During a research focus group at West Point Brene Brown asked a group of officers, many of whom had lost troop members during combat, about the word regret and how it fit into their combat experiences. One officer said, “I wouldn’t say regret. It’s different. I have a profound sense of grief about the losses. I made all of the calls to the parents myself. I would trade places with any of my soldiers in a minute if I could. But I can’t. And I’ve been over it one thousand times. I believe I was doing the best I could with the intelligence we had. Do I wish there was a different outcome? Every minute of the day.”

Wondering if maybe he subscribed to the “no regrets” school of thought, Brebe asked if he had any regrets at all. He responded with a story remarkable similar to the one Saunders included in his speech. “Yes. When I was in high school, there was a girl who had special needs and every now and then she would eat lunch in the cafeteria with us. She had a crush on me and my friends gave me a hard time about it. When she asked to sit with me once, I told her

she couldn't. I deeply regret that. I could have done something different at that moment and I didn't. I deeply regret that I didn't show her more kindness."

I believe that what we regret most our failures of kindness. It seems that is the regret, the rumbling, that lead David to look for Jonathan's Son .It was the need to show kindness to Jonathan's family.

I am sure that you have been a victim of someone's unkindness and they have been a victim of your unkindness.

This weekend I was at the Minneapolis Area Synod Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. This is a group of about 150 congregation joined together in ministry through our denomination. I also attended a workshop on the presence of Christ in our neighborhoods and Pastor Deb Stehlin gave a presentation called, "Living Questionable Lives." Which intrigued me. Living Questionable Lives. What could she possibly mean by that?

Well she started out by sharing a story of a man named Jerry who was the head of his department at work when we experienced the recession in 2008 and his boss started coming to him every few weeks and telling him he had to let one of the employees go. Laying people off was really hard on Jerry so he went and talked to his pastor about it. The pastor recommended that Jerry join the Men's Bible study that met every Wednesday at 6AM and give it a try for 10 weeks and see if dwelling in God's word with some other folks would help.

And it did help some, the prayer time helped, the guys understood the tough situation he was in, the Bible passages offered encouragement.

One day Jerry's boss called him into his office and said Jerry needed to let one more person go. Jerry thought about all of the people who worked under him and realized that they all had children still at home and it would be a real hardship if they lost their job. Jerry's kids were gone from home and doing well. So Jerry fired himself. People asked Jerry, co-workers, neighbors, friends, family- how could you fire yourself?

He replied, "Well I am in this Bible study and Jesus has sacrificed so much for me that this seemed like a small sacrifice in comparison."

When people question why we live our lives the way we do it is an opportunity to talk about faith and Jesus and what is really important to us.