

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan
Talking Points – Kindness and Gentleness
Sunday, October 18, 2020
Rev. Mark Hovermale

Rev. Mark Hovermale – Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to worship today on October 18, 2020. This is a very special service today. We're celebrating the confirmation class. They were confirmed last week, live in the parking lot, but thanks to Susan Underhill, you're going to see a little bit. It's going to be a great time for you to just check out all the highlights from the October 11th parking lot service, in regard to the confirmation class.

We have a couple of announcements. One very important one is that we—First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth and the American Red Cross—are partnering together to host a blood drive. This is very important and here are the details: It's going to be this Wednesday, October 21st from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Check the church's website and also redcross.org to sign up and be part of this important ministry.

At this time we have a special announcement by Dana Hearn of the Associate Pastor Nominating Committee .

Dana Hearn – Announcement from the Associate Pastor Nominating Committee (APNC)

It has been an honor to serve as your Associate Pastor Nominating Committee. We have been blessed by your support, your prayers and encouragement throughout our search process. We are grateful for the trust that you have placed in us during these past ten months. Even more vital to the success of this search is the trust you placed in God to guide us to our new associate pastor. After reviewing nearly 100 resumes and interviewing four candidates, it is with true joy that the APNC unanimously and without reservation recommends Ashley Smith Ashley to serve God in our congregation as the Associate Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth. Depending always on prayer and seeking God's wisdom, we arrived at the essential characteristics for our new associate pastor. We were seeking a compassionate, engaging minister, pastoral by nature, eager to communicate the love and word of God to our congregation. Our new associate pastor would need to collaborate with our senior minister, staff and lay leaders. All of us sensed that God was leading this process; He remained faithful to us throughout. It was with God's guidance and timing that brought us to Ashley with her active and living faith. The APNC believes Ashley has been called to our church at this time. With God as our compass, we wholeheartedly submit our recommendation to you that Ashley Smith Ashley be our new Associate Pastor.

You will have the opportunity to hear Ashley preach at an online service and at the parking lot service on November 8th. We invite you to register for and attend the congregational meeting for the purpose of calling Ashley Smith Ashley as our Associate Pastor on November 8th at 2:00 PM. Information regarding the congregational meeting will be included on our church website and an informational letter will be mailed to each congregation member. We ask for your continued prayers during this time for Ashley Smith Ashley and our congregation. May the grace of God bring you comfort and blessings at this time.

Rev. Mark Hovermale

Thank you, Dana.

We are so excited for worship today, and I want to say a special thank you to Susan Underhill, Reverend Emily Campbell, her daughter Hannah Campbell, and Sarah D'Urso for helping out in today's worship service. At this time Sarah is going to offer our opening prayer.

Sara D'Urso – Opening Prayer

Dear God, we are grateful for the opportunity to join together to worship you and praise you this morning for all that you are and all that you have given us. We thank you for the change of seasons and all of the beauty and color that comes with your creation and we thank you for being constant throughout the change of the seasons and the changes in our lives. Help us cling to you and have faith that you will work for our good. Please forgive us for the times when we haven't been patient through difficult situations or doubted your presence in our lives. Let us place trust in you. Amen.

Rev. Mark Hovermale – Discussion of Sermon Series Theme

Today, we are beginning our new sermon series, "Talking Points," and it is a brand-new series, coming from our life together. We are looking at "talking points" which hopefully will resonate in our lives today, in 2020. We are going to be looking at such topics as forgiveness, humility, grace, love, and gratitude. Today we are looking at the ideas of gentleness and kindness.

Scripture Readings

Hannah Campbell – Reading of Galatians 5:22-23 (NRSV)

²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

Sara D'Urso – Reading of Colossians 3:12 (NIV)

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Hannah Campbell — Reading of 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

Rev. Mark Hovermale — Sermon

Well, again, today's sermon is on kindness and gentleness. One of the major passages of scripture that we heard earlier that really features this is Galatians 5, verses 22 and 23. We know it is the Fruit of the Spirit, and it talks about joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and then gentleness and self-control. I find it very interesting that kindness and gentleness is featured in this.

When you get an email or a letter, we do things automatically, me and you, that we don't even think about. You immediately look at and go - who wrote it, why did they write it, and who did they write it to. We do that automatically, but when it comes to the Bible, I find myself, and maybe you do too, we don't ask those questions.

So let us look at those questions this morning. The one who was writing about the Fruit of the Spirit was the Apostle Paul, and he was writing to churches that he had established on his missionary journeys. Why was he writing? These people, specifically, were being led astray by legalistic beliefs. That is a very fancy way of saying *religious activities* were actually taking them away from their faith in Jesus Christ. We are saying this is what is important, this is what is so important.

I have read somewhere about the Fruit of the Spirit. I want to read to you from an author. He said fruit cannot be humanly manufactured. It can grow only organically as God gives the growth, in this case, through the life-giving energy of the Spirit. Wow! So we cannot do it on our own; just like fruit cannot grow on its own. It has to happen organically.

Paul emphasized kindness and gentleness even more in another letter where he wrote to another group of churches, specifically one church. This time Paul was writing because he was reassuring them, that in spite of all the competing philosophies out there, Christ was still supreme. He writes in Colossians 3:12, "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience."

Both passages by Paul really include and emphasize kindness and gentleness. Now listen, I am not the sharpest tool in the shed, everyone will tell you that! But when the Bible repeats things over and over, I go - we need to pay attention!

When I began to write this sermon, I thought, this is going to be easy! Kindness and gentleness, very easy. This will be a *home run*. I was wrong! The original definition for kindness in the Bible - this is literally what I read - is a series of terms that overlap and are not consistently distinct in meaning. This is not only true in the English translation but in Greek and Hebrew, too. This is a logical way of saying... they have no idea, really, what kindness means. You understand divine kindness: God forgives us and loves us.

Many of the characteristics we're going to talk about in this sermon series, it's a little hard to understand them when it comes to *us*, but we know that we should emulate God's love and his kindness for us in how we act with other people. But it does not come naturally,

at least not for me and maybe not for you. Being kind does not come naturally. If you need evidence of this, look over the next three weeks on social media. Kindness is not everyone's go-to.

Kindness is mentioned in the Bible, and we need to know what it means and apply it to our lives. They don't really know how to define kindness based on the original language and we can't do it on our own. Only God can help us, through the Holy Spirit. Clear as mud! When it gets like this, I try to look at things very practically. When I think of kindness I think of my brother and sister-in-law. They *are* kind but that's not the reason I mention them. They have a plaque in their house that says this: 'Kindness Counts.' I love that plaque and it emphasizes even more to me that Paul takes time out of his big theological discussions to say that kindness and even gentleness, too, count and are very important.

I think today to understand kindness and what it entails is so hard to define, that it might be better to look at the idea of what kindness is not. What is the opposite of it? Well, sarcasm, bluntness, the truth given in a way that hurts people. To say what you really mean, harshly, but then say this, "I'm just kidding," which really means you want to be blunt and harsh, but you want to feel better about *yourself*. So if we look at the opposite of it, kindness is not sarcastic, it's not angry, it doesn't offer truth simply to be right and to hurt others. Kindness, simply put, is putting others first. It doesn't mean we don't hold each other accountable. It doesn't mean we don't tell the truth, but we do so in kindness and with the other's interest at heart. Kindness indeed counts, so here's one question to ask yourself. In regard to kindness, in regard to your relationships, and just in life in general, how's *your* kindness? Another way to ask it is, are you known for your kindness? Are you kind in what you write, you post in an email and how you interact with others? Would you be known for your kindness?

Now it's a little easier to define gentleness when it comes to the original language. The original word means sensitivity of disposition and kindness of behavior, so it includes a little bit of kindness, but here's the key catch. This is founded on strength and prompted by love. The Bible's idea is it evidences itself as a willingness to yield, kind of like a lamb being led to the slaughter. But you remember, in scripture, the lamb was really Jesus Christ being led to the slaughter and he didn't do that out of weakness. Gentleness, yes, but *not* weakness. He came and sacrificed Himself for you and for me out of strength.

God in the Old Testament even reveals Himself in this way. There's a time where the wind comes through and He doesn't reveal himself; not in an earthquake or in a fire. In all these big things He doesn't reveal himself. But he reveals himself in a whisper, a gentle whisper.

In 1 Peter 3:15, there is one last passage that we're going to talk about today that really emphasizes gentleness. It talks about always being prepared to give an answer for the hope you have, which means, both back then and today, we give an answer for hope in Jesus Christ. Everything can be falling apart. The world feels like it's falling apart, but our hope is in Jesus Christ. But here's the second part, which many times we don't pay attention to, do this with gentleness and respect. In this passage, Apostle Peter was writing to gentile and Jewish believers. They were suffering unbelievable persecution and he was saying, "Stay strong, but do so in gentleness." Again, I think if we look at the passage in its context, gentleness will be explained. Where is our hope? Peter gives an

answer, “For your hope, [our hope], is found in Jesus Christ.” That is a fundamental belief, I think, for you and me.

Here's the key. You and I both know people who do tell the truth, but they don't do so with love or gentleness. They are harsh in their manner. Yes, they're factually accurate but they don't do it out of a good heart, they're not gentle, and it hurts people. I think Christians are among the worst. We look at our world today. We wonder, why is everyone so harsh and not gentle? But we, as Christians, many times are not! We don't think about the last part of the scripture passage, to speak with gentleness and respect.

So how do we practically apply gentleness to our lives, even though it's a little tricky to understand biblically? We know what it means but we can't define it, as well. I struggled with the last part of the sermon. How do I wrap up kindness and, specifically, gentleness? Sometimes the writing comes quickly to me, not so much today!

Imagine a parent with a newborn. When Abby came in this world, and I held her for the first time, I was terrified! I was absolutely terrified I was going to drop this baby and bad things were going to happen. By the second one, I kind of held her like a football! Doctor Tim did most of the delivery but I kind of got underneath there and caught the baby and I held her up like a football. But our firstborn Abby—I was holding on to her for dear life, worried she could get hurt. I loved her so much and wanted what was best for her and there it was. And there it is for us. That's the definition of gentleness, loving someone so much and wanting what's best for them, that your actions and how you treat them follow those beliefs.

So I leave you with one final question about gentleness. How are you doing with it? Are you known as a gentle person? The way you act with people, the way you write to people, the way you post, everything about you, would you be known for your gentleness? Throughout this sermon series, you will encounter essential characteristics of a faith-filled life. Can I give you one trick to consider? Over the next four or five Sundays, when you get done listening to the sermon or hearing it live, ask yourself this: *How am I doing?* Amen, and thanks be to God.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Prayers of the People and Benediction

Would you all please play with me. Gracious and loving God, we thank you for your gentleness and kindness offered freely to us regardless of our age or background, gender or race. You cover us with your love and mercy. In response to these, your gifts, we pray that we would be found generous and kind and unafraid of gentleness. We thank you and praise you today for our confirmation students and for their willingness to boldly declare their faith. Thank you for the confirmation teachers, the youth leaders, all the parents and grandparents that helped shape these students' lives, an experience of faith. We thank you, Lord, for the many people that you have placed in our lives who have shaped us with their love, kindness, and gentle care in a world that values strength. Teach us what it means to be your faithful disciples today.

We pray today, Lord, for our nation, asking that you bring gentleness and kindness into discussion of our differences. We pray for leaders in every level of government. Fill them with your Spirit; strengthen them with your peace, your wisdom, and discernment, we pray. We pray also for our world which struggles under the weight of this pandemic as well as other natural disasters. Lord, please bring an end to the chaos and loss. Comfort all who mourn loved ones, sustain them by your promises, grant them your peace. We do pray for peace in our hearts and in our homes, in our church, nation, and world. We thank you for the reminder that we have received today through our APNC committee, through our confirmation students, through our student leaders, that you are still powerfully at work in this time. Help us to trust in your Spirit's leading as we learn to follow you in new ways.

This we ask in the strong name of Jesus Christ, your son, who has taught us when we pray to say together, Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen.

And now let us all go from here in peace, to love and serve the Lord, and as we go, may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon you and upon all those whom you love, this day and forever more. Amen.