



Parish of Finchampstead and California

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

22 August - KINDNESS & GENTLENESS

KINDNESS

Luke 6:31-38

Jesus said, ³¹ 'Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³² If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷ 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

For Paul, kindness is an attribute of God, displayed in the way he treats human beings (see Romans 11:22; Ephesians 2:7), and therefore a wholly desirable attribute for Christians. In Romans 2:1-4 he contrasts human judgement with God's kindness. Luke, in today's reading, explores the same idea in greater detail.

Behind these ideas is the deep-rooted OT theme of the tension between God's justice, which the people time and again deserve to have fallen foul of, and his mercy, which he always wants to prevail. In this context, kindness is shown in its full vigour.

Thus kindness is an attitude of strength, not meekness. It is affirmative action towards those who have least reason to expect it. It's the type of behaviour that Jesus modelled to his disciples when he washed their feet, and to the whole world when he went to his death.

- How easy is it to show kindness without any expectation of a return? Where might we look for examples in our own world?
- Who are our enemies that we should love and be kind to?
- How does the church measure up to these ideas about kindness?

GENTLENESS

1 Thessalonians 2:1,7b-12

¹ You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. ^{7b} Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸ so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. ⁹ Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. ¹¹ For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

'Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart ...', said Jesus in Matthew 11:29. So gentleness has a good pedigree as a Christian virtue. But, as with kindness, we may have too sentimental an idea of what it means to be gentle.

Jesus also described himself as *the Good Shepherd* and today's OT reading - Psalm 23 - has the Lord as our shepherd. Above everything else a shepherd looks after the sheep. Sometimes they may need carrying, but all the time they need shepherding. So an underlying attitude of gentleness doesn't prevent a shepherd doing all that is needed for the flock to be properly looked after.

Similarly in the passage from 1 Thessalonians, even as he is explaining the care he had for his newly converted Christian friends, Paul does not water down the Gospel, use flattery or seek praise (v4-6). Elsewhere he encourages the Galatians to restore sinners to the fellowship *gently* (Galatians 6:1).

So gentleness is not an attribute that over-rides all other considerations. If a hard decision needs to be taken, gentleness is not a good reason to avoid it. But gentleness should still inform the way in which differing views are expressed, and the way in which the decision is implemented.

- How easy do you find it to think or behave in a way that could be described as gentle?
- How persuasive do you find the comments above on what might be described as 'robust gentleness'?
- How could our church life be improved to make it more gentle?