



Theme: B.L.E.S.S.- Loving Others, Changing the World
“Blessed Kindness”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, November 12-13, 2022, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

***⁸ God has told you, O mortal, what is good,
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God?***

– Micah 6:8

(NRSV)

VIDEO Sermon Starter

SONG Kindness (Ely)

SLIDE “Blessed Kindness”

What if we were known for our kindness? I heard that new Steven Curtis Chapman song a few weeks ago and it really touched my heart and struck a nerve. We’ve been talking these past few weeks about how we are blessed to be a blessing, and it begs a question as to what kind of blessing we are going to be. What will we be known for? What will be our legacy?

GRAPHIC You Are Blessed to be a Blessing

To discover what it means to be blessed to be a blessing, we have using this great book by Dave and John Ferguson, **B.L.E.S.S. – 5 Everyday Ways to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World**. We learned that first week that we are blessed to be a blessing as we see in the Biblical story of Abram and Sarai. Many of you have been reading the book with us and you can find copies of it in our narthex area as you leave the sanctuary. I want to suggest to you that living this way not only is good for your neighbor, and our world, but good for your heart and soul.

GRAPHIC B – Begin with Prayer (Fly in 1 at a time.)

L – Listen

E – Eat

S – Serve

S – Story

I want to suggest to you today that living this way, blessing others with prayer, listening, eating, serving, and sharing our stories, move us towards kindness and helps us understand our purpose in life. At a church summer camp for kids, one of the counselors was leading a discussion on the purpose God has for all creation. They began to find good reasons for clouds, and trees and rocks and rivers and animals and just about everything else in nature. Finally, one of the kids said, **“If God has a purpose for everything, then why did he create poison ivy?”**

The counselor gulped and all the students sat in silence for what seemed like an eternity. As he struggled with the answer, one of the other children came to the rescue, saying, **“The reason God made poison ivy is that he wanted us to know there are certain things we should keep our cotton-picken’ hands off of!”**

As the kids at camp discovered, everything in God's creation does have a purpose, something that is useful in God's Kingdom Today, I want to remind us that we have several purposes that can be found in the scriptures, and they are helpful for us to remember as we seek to be a blessing. Here at Summit, we think these are so important that we have named these purposes in our purpose statement as a church.

SLIDE You were made by God to be loved by God.

We have this in the great commandment Jesus gives us in Matthew 22.

BIBLE

³⁷ Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

SLIDE Love God and Love Others

Jesus tries to make this simple for us. Love God and love others. Jesus then gives us final instructions, what we call the great commission, at the end of Matthew's gospel.

BIBLE

¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Baptism is about becoming a member of the body of Christ. Baptism is about claiming our identity as followers of Jesus, who recognize we are baptized into ministry AND the worst thing is never the last thing. It gives us our invitation to bless others with not just our

words but with our lives and our actions.

SLIDE Share the Good News of Hope

Too often, we think about sharing the Good News in ways that feel pushy or harsh or judgmental. I think of Rev. Jed and Sister Cindy who I first met when I was a freshman at CU Boulder. They would visit every Spring and sit in the fountain area next to the Student Union, pound on their Bibles and tell all of us evil college students to repent from our evil ways, or we would go surely wind up in hell! It was quite the show, really, and they always drew a crowd of both observers and hecklers. Jed's favorite line went something like, "You need to repent and stop fornicating! If you keep on fornicating, you will end up a homosexual. And today's homosexuals end up tomorrow's psychology professors!" Then we would all laugh at their nonsense and people would begin to argue with them. It was a show more than anything else.

I never got into their rhetoric, and I thought much of it was hurtful. I do, however, remember, that every year when Rev. Jed and Sister Cindy showed up, we would have new students show up at worship with lots of questions! Mostly they wanted to know where the Methodists thought they would go when they died! Like them or not, Rev. Jed and Sister Cindy got the campus riled up and thinking about things such as heaven and hell and salvation. The problem is that the conversation would never continue. It would flare up, and then die down. No relationships were built, and no life change seemed to be happening, even though the message of Good News is meant to be one of hope.

One of the reasons we have done this series is to find more thoughtful and loving ways to share the Good News. Jesus does commission us to go and tell the world the message of hope and salvation, but we cannot separate from his great commandments to

love God and love others. I want to remind us that we can't save anyone's soul. What we can do is bless others, and we do that by living out the great commandments to love God and love others.

There is a true story of a pastor in a small church in rural Georgia who invited anyone present to stand up and share how they came to accept Christ into their life. A man stood and shared how he became a Christian in Sydney, Australia. "I was at the street corner in Kings Cross when I felt a tug on my sleeve. Turning, I found myself face to face with a man dressed in rags on the street. I thought he was going to ask me for money, but before I could say anything, he simply put a small cross in my hand he had made out of sticks and said he wanted to give me this gift. He then asked me, 'Can I pray for you? Is there something you want me to pray for?' I poured my heart out to him and that conversation stayed with me for three weeks," the man continued. "I had to figure out why someone like that with nothing would want to sit and talk with me, a stranger, and not even ask me for money. I tried to give him some, but he refused! I ended up in a church asking Christ to take my life and use it for his work."

The pastor was amazed that a man with nothing on a street corner could have that effect on someone. But imagine his amazement when, three years later, another man came to his church and gave an almost identical testimony. Shortly after hearing the second testimony, the pastor of that small church in Atlanta had to be in Sydney for a conference. On one of his nights off, he went to Kings Cross to see if he could find the man who had been mentioned at his church by two different people. Pausing on a street corner to look for someone like the man he'd heard about, he felt a tug at his jacket, then felt a wrinkled hand place a cross in his. He turned, and before the poor old man could say anything, the pastor blurted out, "I know what you're going to ask me! You're going to ask if you can pray for me in some

way?!”

The man was stunned. “How did you know that?” he inquired. The pastor told him the whole story. When he finished, the man started to cry. “Mister,” he said, “10 years ago I accepted Christ, and I wanted to do something for him and to bless others. But a man like me can’t do much of anything. So, I decided I would just hang out on this corner, give people the crosses I sit here and make and pray over, and ask people that simple question. I’ve been doing that for years, mister, but tonight is the first time I ever knew it did anybody any good.”

All of us will have the opportunity, and the ability to share our faith with others in how we live our lives. Kindness is infectious and can change the world as we seek to bless others, in big and small ways. This story illustrates a profound truth about blessing others.

SLIDE We never know when a seed we plant will take root.

Just because we invite someone to church, and they say no, doesn’t mean we’ve failed. Just because we bless someone and they don’t seem to be grateful, means we failed. Indeed, we are not called to be successful all the time. We are called to be faithful. If we plant the seeds, God will help them to take root and grow in ways that we never could imagine. That leads me to one last thing I want to leave you with.

SLIDE Blessing with kindness is good for us

This is the best legacy we could leave, and it is one that Jesus learned as a child and lived. He would have known the words of Micah 6:8 which is our memory verse for this week.

BIBLE

***⁸ God has told you, O mortal, what is good,
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God?***

SLIDE Hesed = loving kindness or faithful love

This is the same word that Jesus uses when commands us to love God and love others as we love ourselves. It is a love we choose, not one that we feel. When I work with couples who are getting married, we talk about how the “tingles” kind of love we felt in middle school wears off eventually. It is then our relationships become a love that we choose, and then the feelings return. Jesus teaches us what this looks like in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s gospel, chapter 5.

BIBLE

⁴³ **“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. ⁴⁸ But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.**

The word love that he uses is ***agape***, the same as ***hesed***, meaning loving kindness, faithful love, steadfast love, love that is not a feeling but a choice that we make. You might not be aware that World Kindness Day is November 13. The purpose of World Kindness Day is, “to highlight good deeds in the community focusing on the positive power and the common thread of kindness, which binds us.” Dr. Michelle Robin is a Wellness Coach and director of the 31-day kindness campaign which leads up to World Kindness Day. I love how she helps us remember in this interview being kind, and doing acts of kindness, is a very real way of loving others as we love ourselves. Let’s take a listen.

VIDEO Kindness is good for you

I heard the story of Sarah Rence, a young adult who was active in her church and passed suddenly last year. Her parents invited people to





remember her on their Facebook page on World Kindness day because Sarah had a mission she took on during COVID. She decided to bless people and share the Good News with chalk drawings on people's driveways as a way to encourage and lift people up.

VIDEO Sarah and chalk drawings

I want us to remember today that the invitation and command from Jesus to love God, love others, love ourselves and share the Good News is meant to change us. Jesus long to change us into creatures of kindness because kindness changes us and then it changes the world to become more like the Kingdom of God. Jesus said the Kingdom is now...and not yet. We are living in it now because of Jesus and his work on the cross, and we are now invited to be his presence as we help God's Kingdom come, and God's will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

I have shared with you a few times that we hired a coach to work with me and our leaders and staff during the pandemic, to help us get stronger and better coming out of this tumultuous time. I really believe God can use those tough times to bring about something beautiful and really did not want to waste the pain of those couple of years! Out of that we developed a Strategic Vision for 2025.

SLIDE Strategic Vision for 2025 (have them fly in)

-  **Love God by having more join us in worship**
-  **Love Others by serving**
-  **Share the Good News offering baptism**
-  **And Investing in the next generations**

None of those goals matter, however, if we don't live out *hesed*, *agape*, loving kindness and faithful love that is a choice. We have numbers around each of those pieces of our Strategic Vision for 2025, but I want to be clear that we don't just dream up numbers for numbers sake. I remember hearing lots about church growth when I was first starting out as a pastor, and how we need to be concerned

with how many new people we reached as a church. We used to even argue about the numbers game seminary, and I made this commitment at that time that I would not worry about numbers. I would just pastor the church I served, and if God brought new people to us, then so be it. If we just took care of business in the Church, God would do the rest. Numbers weren't important.

I was content with this until I went to a seminar just a few years after serving full time at a church. The seminar was on Building a Healthy Church, and the speaker was really harping on how most of today's churches just are not healthy because they don't take seriously the Great Commandment to love God and love others, AND the Great Commission, which is to go and make disciples. There began to be great debate as pastors from small churches argued against worrying about numbers, and pastors from large churches argued that we should always strive to grow and get bigger. They had two mics set up for this debate, and one pastor got up there and said, "Quality is what's important, not quantity." From the other microphone a pastor countered, "Quantity is a measure of quality!"

As the group argued with each other in our chairs, a woman stepped to the microphone. She was a member of the host church and had come to deliver donuts for our conference. She asked quietly, "May I say something?" The room became quiet as the leader of our forum asked for quiet so we could hear this woman who dared speak with so many loud-mouthed pastors in the room!

She began, "I couldn't help but hear your discussion and I wanted to share something with you. This is a big church, with over 3 thousand people each Sunday I believe. Some say all we worry about as a church is numbers, and constantly reaching new people. But I'm one of those new people, and if it weren't for a member here who was willing to reach out to me and share Christ, I would be dead. I'm an alcoholic and have been sober through AA and all kinds of plans, but never could stay that way. Finally, someone from this church moved into the apartment

next to me and invited me to worship. I was hesitant at first. I first came two years ago and have since discovered a new purpose for my life. I realized Jesus cared about even me, and so I accepted him as my Lord and Savior, and I guess became one of your ‘numbers.’ To you all I may be a number, but to me it was my life. I am thankful that this church does care about numbers, because if it didn’t, I might be a number in a graveyard. Better here than there I guess.”

And with that she stepped quietly away from the microphone, teaching me that sharing the Good News is about numbers, and so much more. It’s about numbers of changed lives, and that is a purpose of our church. Members of the body of Christ, I tell you today that one of our main purposes is go and make disciples, sharing the Good News of hope that we have experienced with all we meet. Sometimes, we do it with our words, and sometimes, we do with our lives, seeking to bless people with kindness, prayer, a listening ear, a shared meal, an act of service, and the story of salvation. If we do that, then God will add to our numbers, and we will become like the church which faithfully fulfilled its purpose of helping people follow Jesus as they loved God, loved others, loved themselves, and shared the Good News. May we be so bold.

We wrap up today’s message, and this series, with an invitation. We have a few folks who will be getting fully into our portable baptism pool today and we get to celebrate that. I have water I brought back from Philippi in Greece where Paul baptized Lydia, the first person to be baptized in Europe. We invite you to join us down here at the tub and remember your baptism today if you would like. If you have not been baptized, let us know as we’ll have this tub set up again early in 2023.

GRAPHIC **Paul meets Lydia**

GRAPHIC **Lydia Baptized** (leave up as people come forward.)

SLIDE **Prayer**

November 12-13 Order

1. Ely welcomes people and says, **“Today we talk about the connection between blessing and kindness.”**
2. Two Songs
3. Jeff welcomes and invites people to greet each other however comfortable and be seated.
 - a. Fill out the Connect card online and we will donate to the Garden Ministry in your name that feeds people in our community.
4. Announcement Video
5. Sermon
6. Baptisms/Renewal of Baptisms
7. Prayer
8. Two Songs
9. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
10. Offering SLIDE and Focus (Hurricane Relief)
11. Care Ministers (If any are present)
12. Prayers and Closing Thoughts
 - i. Prayer focus November is generosity
13. Closing Prayer