

Take a Cup of Kindness

We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet, for auld lang syne, goes the famous Rabbie Burns poem. We sing it every year and it is sung throughout the world, as one old year parts and a new one enters.

I would guess that this year it will be more poignant than ever. For the sake of auld lang syne – old times that have passed, we'll take a cup of kindness.

That's what we need today more than ever – to pass a cup of kindness to each other.

In our reading today we meet with Dorcas, a special woman who was known for her fair share of cups of kindness.

She lived in Jaffa, modern day Joppa.

Jaffa, is also called Joppa, the southern and oldest part of Tel Aviv. It is an ancient port city in Israel. Jaffa is famous for its association with the biblical stories of Jonah, Solomon and Peter.

Today we have an amazing multi-denominational Church of Scotland school called Tabeetha School which "*welcomes all children regardless of race, nationality, gender or religion*". It was founded in 1863 and still today is a cup of kindness to all religions.

2000 years ago, there was a godly woman in this town called Tabitha or, to give her her Sunday name and Greek name, Dorcas, which simply means a deer. Well-named for she was a woman of grace. As a deer is gracious, so Dorcas was gracious in her nature.

There are only a few verses to Tabitha in the bible, and yet in these few verses we catch a glimpse of her character.

The Apostle Peter happened to be in neighbouring Lydda. We are told that he was travelling about, encouraging the saints, the Christians, of these local towns.

How good it is to serve the Lord by encouraging the saints.

Who were the saints?

Those in active Christian service for the Lord?

To be a saint is simply to be an active Christian. The word Paul uses to describe church members in his letters, is the word saint.

The Greek word is *hagios* and this is sometimes translated holy, but the root meaning of holy is the word 'different'.

Basically, Christians are men and women who are different from those who are people of the world.

There is a stamp upon them.

So, when we use the word 'holy', to describe Christians, we are saying that they are different.

They are holy because they are different.

The people of Israel were called holy, set apart and different, and so the church became the true Israel, and they became God's holy people. We are different because we serve a different master and we march to the sound of a different drum.

A saint is someone who is different because they are following Christ.

In active service Peter was available and ready to respond to a call for help.

That call came from Joppa.

The disciples heard that Peter was at hand and so they sent for him, *Please, come at once!* This was an emergency, one of their bright lights had become unwell. One of their saints was on her death bed.

He had 12 miles to travel up the coast to Joppa. Peter did this as quickly as he could, after he had healed a paralysed man named Aeneas. But when Peter arrived, he was met by grieving widows, for Dorcas had passed away.

Notice how Luke describes Dorcas. He simply says, "*She was always doing good and helping the poor*". This was how she was known. She made clothes for the poor. She dedicated her life to helping others. She was continually passing the cup of kindness.

In those days, there would have been many poor widows – no social benefits or handouts from the Government. The poor were literally on their knees and on the doorsteps of Christians.

Dorcas shone like a bright star in a dark sky. She took the initiative and lived a life worthy of being called a disciple. She was, in the eyes of Peter, a saint.

Luke calls her a disciple, and this beautiful term described Dorcas to a T, she was a disciple, a follower, a learner of Jesus. She was a follower of Christ. She dedicated her life to following Jesus.

We are not told of her testimony, or how she came to know Christ as her Saviour, but what we do know is that she was totally committed to him, and everyone knew this. She wouldn't have been a preacher, but she went about passing the cup of kindness.

Jesus said, *"I am the way, truth and life"*.

To be a true disciple of Jesus, we need those three principles to be at the centre of our lives.

To walk in his way, to hold on to his truth and to experience his life.

Dorcas certainly walked in his way.

When we look at the life of Jesus, he was always going about doing good and showing kindness.

That's how Peter describes Jesus in Acts 10:38.

"You know about Jesus of Nazareth and how God poured out on him the Holy Spirit and power. He went everywhere, doing good and healing all who were under the power of the Devil, for God was with him."

Jesus was passing the cup of kindness to everyone he met.

Dorcas was also like this; she was a reflection of her Saviour.

She walked in the way of Jesus and so when she died, her house was crowded with widows, who turned up in grief to show their respects to her, they were heartbroken as they showed Peter some of the garments that Dorcas had made for them.

She was loved and well respected in this community. She was a woman who had a Christlike heart, going about and doing good and showing kindness.

Today, we come to our fifth Fruit of the Spirit, and one which is very important at this time of national crisis. That is the cup of kindness. Robbie Burns was right all these years ago, *take the cup of kindness*.

Paul said kindness is a fruit of the spirit, it is evidence that we are Christians, followers of Jesus and walking in his way, when we show kindness.

Kindness is evidence that Christ is in our heart.

We are not Christian because we are kind; we are Christian because Christ lives in our heart, and this produces a quality of kindness that comes from Christ.

You see it's a fruit, and the fruit never falls far from the tree, and the tree is Christ.

Jesus said, *“I am the vine and you are branches and those who abide in me will bear much fruit”*.

The Apostle Paul wrote *“Love is kind”*. Kindness is without doubt a spectrum of love.

In the KJV the word we use for 'kindness' is 'gentleness' but our modern translations uses the word 'kindness' and later in the fruits the word 'gentleness' appears in the modern version which has been changed from 'meekness'.

But with kindness, we get a beautiful picture of a lovely fruit of the spirit.

Some of my favourite stories have been stories which have kindness as the turning point in the story.

Like the Good Samaritan, which is a great example of kindness. The Greek word for kindness is *Chrestos* and you know what other word we associate with the Greek word *Christos*.

But part of the meaning of the word *Chrestos* is 'useful'.

Biblical kindness leads to usefulness, and the Samaritan in Jesus' classic story was above all useful. He put his love into action and he showed kindness. So, kindness is love in action.

It's about helping, sharing, giving, caring, encouraging, extending mercy and being filled with compassion.

Jesus was often described as *“being moved with compassion”* and kindness is when we put that compassion into action.

We don't know how many undergarments and practical necessities Dorcas made for her needy women, but what we do know is that they were extremely grateful, that they were full of appreciation. We don't know how many souls Dorcas won for Christ, but we do know her kindness made a difference to many people.

Little random acts of kindness can change people's lives.

Kindness can be a bridge to peace and happiness; it can be a creator of laughter and delight; it can be a tool that can tighten and strengthens bonds; it can be a bucket that can douse bitterness and blame.

What the church needs today is this beautiful fruit of kindness evident to all.

Ephesians 4:32-33, Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, *“be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake forgave you”*.

If the early church needed these words of challenge and encouragement, so we need to hear them today.

As with last week's sermon, when we looked at the virtue of long-suffering and saw that this was a virtue that was at the centre of God's heart.

Today we recognise that kindness is also who God is. Paul writes that we must be kind to one another, even as God for Christ's sake forgave us.

In displaying the virtue of kindness, we are simply displaying the kindness of God. We are becoming imitators of God's kindness to us.

There is a beautiful story about a young girl who lived in a big house back in the days when those houses had servants. The house contained many lovely art objects - among those a beautiful statue, mounted in a stairway alcove, of a glamorous young woman.

As the servant girl went about her work, she would gaze upon the statue. After some time the lady of the house said to her, "*I declare, young girl, that you are beginning to look as beautiful as the girl on the statue you admire so much*".

The young girl started to take on the image of the statue.

There is a moral for us in this story, that the more we gaze on Jesus Christ, the more we long to be like him in character, the more we meditate on his kindness and goodness, the more that we will become like him.

Constant reading of the gospels, studying his life, and taking time to adopt the principles that he had in his life, will help us to become like him.

It is said that, to write a good biography, the biographer must get to know his subject intimately, he must learn about all his little idiosyncrasies and his habits, and start to adopt them so that he will understand the subject better, and when he starts to become like him, then he can write about him.

There is a great old hymn:

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;

Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.

Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,

Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;

Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.

*By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.*

*Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide;
And run not before Him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.*

*Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,
Each thought and each motive beneath His control.
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.*

And therein lies the secret of the Christian life.

Make time to cultivate the fruits of the spirit. Take time to spend in the presence of our Lord.

I am the vine and you are the branches, and when we spend that time our branches will produce much fruit.

I will leave with you three questions this morning for you to peruse and consider.

- Am I spending enough time with Jesus?
- Is his fruit of kindness showing in my life?
- This week, who can we pass a cup of kindness to?

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen.