

Column

By no means was he opposed to it, but he was intrigued when it was announced that Random Act of Kindness Week was to be observed in his senior living community. Dr. Manning Pattillo, a past president of Oglethorpe University, opined that he preferred to perform ‘deliberate’ acts of kindness, not just one week in February, but every day.

Dr. Pattillo shared this observation with me a few years ago, but it remains relevant and worthy of our consideration today, especially in view of all that we proclaimed in our churches on Easter Day. If what we said in our hymns, anthems and scripture readings is true; if Christ has risen from the dead; if Satan’s prison house has been stormed and opened; if fear has been replaced with hope, death with life – what place should kindness have in our lives?

Put another way: How should we who profess the Christian creed live?

If God has so loved us that He sent His Son to take our place, “the just for the unjust” (1 Peter 3:18), should not we extend the same mercy and kindness that has been extended to us to others and be diligent about it? The answer is obvious.

Having a kindness week in February is no doubt good and praiseworthy. It serves as an important reminder, but the cross and empty tomb takes the concept to a whole new level and expands it.

Whether random or deliberate, acts of kindness done in light of and in response to the Gospel is one way those who have been marked as Christ’s own in baptism distinguish themselves as Christ’s followers in the world. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another,” says Jesus in John 13:35.

The “one to another” in this verse refers first to those within the family of faith, Christian brothers and sisters. Of necessity that is where acts of love and kindness must begin, but they mustn’t end there. As a pebble dropped into the water of a placid lake produces radiating circles, so these acts must spread out beyond the Christian’s own tribe. When they do, people on the outside, at least some, will take note and be drawn toward the light of the Gospel. Acts of kindness lead to questions and perhaps to conversations and conversions.

The very least we can do is to view and treat everyone we meet – whether in an exclusive club or prison -- as someone created in the image of God. In some, the divine image may have been defaced by sin almost to the point of no recognition, but it has not been obliterated. Respect is therefore due, and acts of kindness are in order and God honoring.

Dr. Pattillo is right: don’t wait for some secular organization to stage a week for kindness, look for opportunities today. Be deliberate. Acting in this manner is what follows from our Easter faith.

Remember – not everyone can be physically beautiful or handsome, not everyone can own or be president of a Fortune 500 company, not everyone can achieve fame and celebrity status, but everyone can be kind.

O LORD GOD, mighty and merciful, hear our prayers touching every ill wherewith this world is beset, that thou remove it according to thy grace; for the afflicted, the sick, the destitute, the imprisoned, and them that have no helper, that thou succour [come to the aid of] each according to his need; and for all in the captivity of sin, that thou deliver them at the supplication which we most humbly offer in the name of Jesus Christ thy Son Our Lord. Amen. (King’s College, Cambridge)

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