

Lovingkindness: Along the Way

Romans 16:1-16
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman
June 30, 2024

Today is a continuation and culmination of a week of Vacation Church School. Changing the world with lovingkindness is the theme, and compassion is the focus. Last Sunday, we explored the term translated as lovingkindness, and often as steadfast love, in the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament. This term is used primarily in reference to the nature and character of God, expressing God's unwavering unconditional love towards us, thus highlighting God's faithfulness and compassion. Lovingkindness is also something we are called to live out and share with one another. Together, lovingkindness is another way to express the part of our congregation's Mission Statement that declares our intention to "**receive and openly share the love of God**".

Each day of Vacation Church School walked us through a different way to understand and show compassion. We learned that compassion is all around us, and that we need to begin by showing compassion toward ourselves in the form of self-care. If you're like most folks, **we could all do a little better in this area of self-compassion and self-care.**

Using the story of Jesus' parable of The Good Samaritan, we explored how we are to **extend compassion toward our neighbors**, especially to those that others just pass by without helping. Being neighborly is defined by how we show compassion to others.

The story of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit allowing diverse people to hear in their own languages and hence build community, helped us see how we are to have compassion for the entire world. Surprise, not everyone is like us. **Our diversity is simply part of God's good creation, and we are to expand and spread compassion worldwide.**

And finally today, we are exploring how **the compassion of others has been and continues to be with us along the way as we travel through our life's journey.** To help us see this, the curriculum, from Illustrated Ministry, chose a rather obscure passage of scripture. In the closing chapter of his letter to the Christian community in Rome, the apostle Paul lists many, many people who have chosen compassion as a way of life. This list of people, to which Paul asks to share his greetings and appreciation, introduces us to all those who have been a part of our own lives who have and continue to show lovingkindness toward us as we journey along the way through life. The curriculum states it this way.

Walking together with others means we are not alone in our life and faith journey. We witness how we are a part of a global faith family that transcends time and place. We learn about our faith siblings who have shared God's love to humankind and all creation throughout time. We explore Romans 16 as a celebration of some of these ancestors—of the people who came before us and lived out compassion in the Christian community of the first century.

Through remembering these faith siblings, we locate ourselves within this ancient stream of people who have chosen compassion. We then consider how we might continue to share compassion in the future.

This brings us full circle to where we began last Sunday by recognizing that lovingkindness is all around us and has been a crucial part of our life's journey. Like the apostle Paul sharing his greeting with people who now live far away, **think about all the people in your life who now live far away, and yet you still feel that compassionate bond of connection.** If you were writing a letter like Paul, who would you include on your list, and how do you think they would feel when they heard their name read aloud? WE could certainly make a list of those who have gone before us here at College Hill, and those still with us, who were and are filling with lovingkindness and compassion.

So again, **who has shown you lovingkindness and compassion along the way throughout your life? To whom have you extended lovingkindness and compassion as they have journeyed along the way in their life?** While you can probably think of the names of many, perhaps there are countless examples of people whose name you have either forgotten or never knew in the first place. All are included in that "great cloud of witnesses" that care about you and me. The lovingkindness and steadfast love of God toward us and all of creation is deeply embedded in the mix of all this.

Therefore, it is with gratitude that I share a greeting of thanks to Betsy Guyer, our new Director of Children and Family Ministry, who organized and helped lead this deeply meaningful and fun Vacation Church School this year. Betsy put together a remarkable team who I also want to thank: Bryan and Clay Finkward for preparing our delicious meals; Susan West who led the children in engaging crafts; Kye May for leading games; the non-profit community partners who shared their work with the adults, and our adult volunteers who helped in all of these areas. I certainly enjoyed leading the Bible Story portion of our gatherings.

As I closed the sermon last Sunday, I do similarly today:

- Take a serious look and inventory of the ways God has blessed you with God's lovingkindness and steadfast love.
- Think about the times lovingkindness has been extended and shared *with* you by others, and *by* you towards others.

May our lovingkindness and compassion jump into action when others need it most. If need be, start small with those closest to you, including yourself, then expand your circle of compassion. Know deep inside that lovingkindness is all around us. It is a powerful force that can transform lives and relationships. Therefore, as a part of the nature and character of God, may that be true of our own nature and character, as those created in God's image and who follow the ways and teachings of Jesus. **Let us receive and openly share the love of God – God's lovingkindness.**

And by the way, as a reminder, we're closing Vacation Church School after this service of worship today with frozen treats offered to one and all.

Amen.