Bethel South Sermon Notes – “Jesus, Friend of Sinners”

Speaker: Ps Mike Gowans
Series: The Kindness Conspiracy
Scriptures: Luke 19:1–10, Titus 3:4–5, Proverbs 12:25, 2 Samuel 9, Acts 3:1–10

Main Idea:

Jesus didn't avoid sinners, overlook the hurting, or define people by their past. He intentionally moved toward those whom others rejected and demonstrated the transforming power of God's kindness. As followers of Jesus, we are called to do the same. Biblical kindness sees people, speaks life, and takes action. When we remember the mercy and kindness God has shown us, we become willing to extend that same love to others.

The Conspiracy of Kindness

When we hear the word conspiracy, we usually think of people secretly working together to accomplish something harmful.

But what if we turned that idea upside down?

What if the Church became a group of people intentionally working together to do good?

That's the heart behind Bethel's Conspiracy of Kindness series.

We want to become people who intentionally demonstrate God's love throughout our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities.

Kindness isn't simply about being polite or having good intentions. It's about noticing people and taking action to show them the love of Jesus.

God's kindness was *never* meant to *stop* with us. It was meant to flow *through* us.

Jesus and Zacchaeus [Luke 19:1–10]

In Luke 19, Jesus encounters a man named Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector, a wealthy man, and someone deeply disliked by his community. Tax collectors were often viewed as dishonest traitors because they collected taxes on behalf of Rome and frequently exploited their own people.

Zacchaeus carried the reputation of a sinner and an outcast. But when Jesus came through Jericho, Zacchaeus desperately wanted to see Him. Because he was short and couldn't see over the crowd, he climbed into a sycamore tree.

He was willing to *humble* himself just to catch a *glimpse* of Jesus.

And something remarkable happened.... Jesus stopped.

He looked up. He called Zacchaeus by name. And He invited Himself into Zacchaeus's home. While the crowd saw a sinner, Jesus saw a person worth pursuing. When you humble yourself, God sees you. This encounter reveals four powerful truths about the kindness of Jesus and how we are called to treat others.

Four Truths About Biblical Kindness

1. Jesus Sees the Person Others Have Labeled [Luke 19:1–5]

Zacchaeus had been labeled by the people around him.

To them, he was a crooked tax collector, a traitor, and a sinner.

But Jesus didn't allow those labels to determine how He treated Zacchaeus.

He saw beyond his reputation. He saw the person. People may label you, but *Jesus sees you*.

Throughout Scripture, we see that God consistently notices those whom others overlook.

Peter and John See the Beggar [Acts 3:1–10]

When Peter and John encountered a man who had been unable to walk since birth, they didn't simply ignore him or walk past.

They stopped and engaged with him.

While the man was expecting money, God had something greater in store.

Through the power of Jesus, the man received healing.

The encounter began because Peter and John were willing to notice someone others had become accustomed to passing by.

God Sees David

When the prophet Samuel came to anoint Israel's next king, David wasn't even initially presented alongside his brothers.

He was overlooked by his own family.

But God saw him.

Others may have failed to recognize David's significance, but God knew exactly who he was.

David Shows Kindness to Mephibosheth [2 Samuel 9]

Years later, David demonstrated that same heart toward Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan.

Mephibosheth was unable to walk and lived outside the royal household.

But David intentionally sought him out to show him kindness for Jonathan's sake.

David restored his inheritance and gave him a permanent place at the king's table.

These stories reveal an important truth:

God sees the overlooked, and He calls us to see them too.

There are people all around us who feel invisible, forgotten, or defined by their mistakes.

Kindness begins when we choose to see them the way Jesus does.

2. Jesus Moves Toward the Person Others Avoid [Luke 19:5–7]

Jesus didn't simply acknowledge Zacchaeus from a distance.

He took a step toward him.

He told Zacchaeus that He was coming to his house.

This was shocking to the people watching.

They couldn't understand why Jesus would associate with someone they considered a sinner.

But Jesus was known for being a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

He didn't distance Himself from broken people.

He intentionally moved toward them.

Are We Willing to Be Friends of Sinners?

As followers of Jesus, we must ask ourselves whether we're willing to build relationships with people who don't think, believe, or live exactly like us.

It's easy to show kindness to people we already like.

It's more challenging to extend friendship to those who make us uncomfortable or whom others have rejected.

But that's exactly what Jesus modeled.

We cannot reach people we refuse to move toward.

Friendship Begins with Being Friendly

Building meaningful relationships doesn't have to be complicated.

Sometimes it begins with simple actions:

- Introduce yourself and learn someone's name.
- Ask genuine questions about their life.
- Listen without immediately trying to respond.
- Show curiosity about their experiences.
- Take time to make someone feel valued.

People can often tell when we're genuinely interested in them.

When we listen and care, we communicate that they matter.

And genuine relationships can open doors for people to experience God's love.

Kindness creates connection, and connection creates opportunities to share Jesus.

3. Kindness Notices, Speaks, and Acts

Biblical kindness is more than a feeling.

It moves from awareness into action.

Ps Mike emphasized three practical expressions of kindness:

#1 - Kindness Notices

The first step is simply paying attention.

We live in a world where people are constantly rushing, distracted, or focused on their own responsibilities.

It's easy to walk past someone without recognizing what they might be experiencing.

But kindness requires us to slow down.

Look around.

Pay attention.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you notice the people who need encouragement or support.

You cannot respond to a need you refuse to notice.

#2 - Kindness Speaks

Proverbs 12:25

Proverbs reminds us that anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word can cheer someone up.

Our words have the ability to encourage, strengthen, and restore hope.

There are people around us who may be carrying burdens we know nothing about.

Sometimes a simple word of encouragement can make an enormous difference.

It might sound like:

- "I really appreciate you."
- "You're doing a great job."
- "I'm thankful you're in my life."
- "I believe in you."
- "You matter to God."

We often underestimate the power of speaking life into someone.

A timely word of encouragement can lift a heart that's been weighed down.

#3 - Kindness Acts

Kindness doesn't stop with what we see or say.

It takes practical action.

Sometimes that means giving our time.

Sometimes it means buying someone a meal, offering a ride, helping with a project, or meeting a need.

Kindness doesn't have to be expensive or dramatic.

It simply needs to be genuine.

A small act of kindness can communicate God's love in a way that someone will never forget.

Biblical kindness moves from our eyes, to our words, to our actions.

4. We Show Kindness Because God First Saw Us [Titus 3:4–5]

The foundation of Christian kindness is remembering what God has already done for us.

Titus reminds us that when the kindness and love of God appeared, He saved us.

Not because of our righteous works.

Not because we deserved His mercy.

But because of His goodness and compassion.

Before we ever demonstrated kindness toward others, God showed kindness toward us.

We don't show kindness to earn God's love. We show kindness because we've already received it.

Don't Become Like the Dead Sea

God's kindness was never meant to stop with us.

Consider the difference between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee.

The Dead Sea receives water but has no outlet.

The Sea of Galilee receives water and allows it to flow outward.

This provides a picture of how God's love should operate in our lives.

We are not called to simply receive His goodness and keep it to ourselves.

We are called to allow His kindness to flow through us.

What God has done for you, He wants to do through you.

Refresh Others and Be Refreshed

Sometimes when we're discouraged, lonely, or struggling, our instinct is to wait for someone else to reach out.

We hope someone will call, check on us, or offer encouragement.

But what if we turned that around?

Instead of waiting for someone to encourage us, what if we picked up the phone and encouraged someone else?

Instead of waiting to be noticed, what if we intentionally noticed another person?

When we refresh others, we often find ourselves refreshed in the process.

Generosity and kindness have a way of shifting our focus beyond our own circumstances.

Sometimes the encouragement you need begins with the encouragement you give.

The Vision: 52,000 Acts of Kindness

Bethel has approximately 1,000 people attending services each weekend.

Imagine what could happen if every person committed to performing just one intentional act of kindness every week...

1,000 Acts per week

= 4,000+ Acts per month

= 52,000 Acts per year

That's 52,000 opportunities to demonstrate God's love throughout our homes, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities.

Each act may seem small on its own.

But together, they can create a powerful ripple effect.

Imagine how many people could be encouraged, supported, or introduced to the love of Jesus through intentional kindness.

The goal isn't recognition or personal credit.

The goal is to make the kindness of Jesus visible through the way we live.

Who Is *Your* Assignment?

It's easy to think about showing kindness to people we already enjoy being around.

But Jesus challenges us to go further.

Think about the people you've been overlooking.

Who have you been too busy to notice?

Who have you been avoiding because they frustrate you or get on your nerves?

Who have you already decided isn't worth your time?

The person who just came to mind may be the very person God is calling you to reach.

Jesus didn't wait for Zacchaeus to become acceptable to the crowd before showing him kindness.

He moved toward him while others were still rejecting him.

Kindness doesn't wait for someone to deserve it. It responds to the love and mercy we've already received from God.

Final Challenge

This week, commit to one intentional act of kindness.

Don't leave it to chance.

Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to someone who needs God's love.

Be willing to notice the person others overlook.

Move toward someone you've been avoiding.

Speak a word of encouragement.

And follow through with a practical act of kindness.

Remember that Jesus saw Zacchaeus when everyone else saw a sinner.

He stopped, called him by name, and demonstrated that he mattered.

Now we have the opportunity to do the same for others.

Notice someone. Speak life. Take action. And let the kindness of Jesus flow through you this week.

Discussion Questions:

1. In the story of Zacchaeus, Jesus saw beyond the labels others had placed on him. How can we become more intentional about seeing people for who they are rather than judging them by their reputation, appearance, or past?

2. Jesus willingly moved toward people others avoided. Who are the people we tend to distance ourselves from, and what might it look like to demonstrate genuine friendship and kindness toward them?

3. Ps Mike taught that kindness notices, speaks, and acts. Which of these three areas comes most naturally to you, and which one do you need to grow in?

4. Titus 3 reminds us that God's kindness toward us wasn't based on anything we had earned or deserved. How should remembering His mercy change the way we treat people who are difficult to love?

5. Who is one person you've been overlooking or avoiding that God may be calling you to show kindness to this week? What specific action can you take to demonstrate the love of Jesus to them?