



**From the Pulpit: September 17, 2023**

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Family Festival

**The Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg**

I Corinthians 13:1–4; Micah 6:6–8

*The Greatest of These, II: Kindness*

This fall we're preaching a sermon series called *The Greatest of These*. We're looking at what St. Paul has to say about love in First Corinthians 13:

*If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind;*

And then from the Hebrew scriptures, Micah:

*"With what shall I come before the Lord  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"  
He 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?*

**T**he Scottish preacher Henry Drummond says that in I Corinthians 13, St. Paul is breaking up the apparently common and simple concept of love into its compound, complex, colorful, captivating constituents, like a physicist will do with monochromatic amber sunlight by passing it through a prism.<sup>1</sup> Or like the raindrops in the air after a cloudburst will turn blond sunlight into a brilliant red, blue, orange, and violet rainbow.

“We’re to Do  
Justice and to Love  
Kindness. But isn’t  
it interesting that  
this terse précis sets  
kindness adjacent to  
justice?”

“Love is patient,” says St. Paul. “Love is kind,” says St. Paul. Kindness is the second of the compound, complex, colorful, captivating constituents of the apparently simple concept of love.

At Kenilworth Union, our mission statement has two parts. It has a Christian part and a Jewish part. It has a Greek part and a Hebrew part. It has a New Testament part and an Old Testament part.

The Christian, Greek part is from the Gospel of Matthew: “Love God above all and your neighbor as yourself.” The Jewish, Hebrew part comes from the prophet Micah: “God has shown you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.”

<sup>1</sup>Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World* (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2015), p. 12. The book originated from a sermon Mr. Drummond gave in England in 1884.

It's so simple, isn't it? I decided to come to Kenilworth Union almost ten years ago now because you subscribe to the KISS Principle—Keep it Simple, Stupid. You ditch complicated faith statements like the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed and distill the faith down to a simple statement from our scriptures: Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk humbly.

We can make it even simpler: Do. Love. Walk. It's such a beautiful Trinity of Teachings, a Trifecta of Tenets, a Hatrick of Hints. Do. Love. Walk.

Micah 6:8 gathers up the whole Hebrew Bible into one short verse. It's like a terse précis or an elegant abstract of all the prophetic teachings. There are 15 writing prophets in the Hebrew Bible. They cover almost 300 pages in my Bible. There are 176,000 words. This is it on a microchip.

We're to Do Justice and to Love Kindness. But isn't it interesting that this terse précis sets kindness adjacent to justice? They're very different things. Justice is huge, global, burly, and muscular. Kindness is small, local, soft, and delicate. We do justice at Town Hall, or in Springfield, or in Washington, or in Brussels. Or in Moscow where they **DON'T** do justice. We do kindness in the home, at the office, in the classroom, on the football field.

Justice is feeding the poor and sheltering the homeless. Justice is caring for the aged. Social Security is justice. Justice is if you're a white, male, septuagenarian legislator, keep your laws off a 30-year-old woman's body. Like in Illinois.

Justice is Ketanji Brown Jackson speaking from the pulpit of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham on Friday, the 60th anniversary of a bombing that killed four little girls there. "They could have broken barriers," she said. "They could have shattered ceilings," she said. "They could have grown up to be doctors or lawyers or judges on the highest court in the land," she said.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by Erica Green and Abbie Van Sickle, "A Call in Birmingham for a Nation to Recall Ugly Truths of the Past," *The New York Times*, September 16, 2023.

That's Justice. Kindness is making the casserole, writing the note, picking up the phone, picking up the **tab**, letting the other driver in, showing up unannounced in the doorway of the heartbroken.

Justice is huge and kindness is small. It's a pebble next to a boulder, a MINI Cooper next to a Ford F650 Truck, a golf ball next to a basketball. Which doesn't make it any less important.

Justice is feeding  
the poor and  
sheltering the  
homeless...  
Kindness is making  
the casserole"

Do you know someone who is un-faillingly friendly, kind, solicitous, and deferential to his clients and colleagues; but rude, short, harsh, and indifferent to his own kids? Don't answer that. **Justice** is for the **human** family. **Kindness** is for our **own** family. St. Paul doesn't quite say this, but almost: it is impossible to be loving and unkind at the same time.

Does anybody know Mary-Claire King? She hasn't lived here for a long time, but she was born in Wilmette. When she was 15 years old, her best friend died of cancer, so she devoted her life to that kind of work. When she was working on her Ph.D. at Cal Berkeley, she was the one who proved that chimpanzees and human beings share 99% of their genetic make-up.

In 1981, while teaching at Cal Berkeley, she applied for a huge grant from the National Institute of Health. She had to fly from San Francisco to Washington to defend her proposal. Days before she was to leave, her husband of eight years left her and took off to Costa Rica with one of his graduate students. But it was okay; he gave her a vacuum cleaner to soften the blow.

Dr. King convinces her mother to fly from Chicago to San Francisco to watch her five-year-old daughter Emily while she flies to Washington. But when her mother arrives at the San Francisco Airport, she says she can't do it. She is furious with Mary-Claire for letting her marriage fall apart like that. "How could you leave your daughter without a father like this? I'm flying straight home."

Dr. King works it out. “Okay then, I’ll take Emily with me to Washington. She says to her mother, “You go find your gate to Chicago while we wait here at our gate for Washington.” Her mother says, “I can’t find my way across this giant airport by myself.” Now, bear in mind that this is 1981; it was way easier back then; no security checkpoints. Dr. King says, “Well, what will I do with Emily?” Her mother says, “Well, you can’t leave a five-year-old alone in a giant airport.” Fair enough.

Just then, Dr. King hears a familiar voice from the guy sitting next to her at the gate. “Emily and I will be just fine.” Dr. King says, “Oh, thank you so much, sir.” Her mother says, “You can’t leave your five-year-old with a stranger.” And Dr. King says, “Mom, if you can’t trust Joe DiMaggio, who can you trust?”

Joltin’ Joe says, “Hi, Emily, I’m Joe.” Emily replies, “Hi Joe, I’m Emily,” and they start to get to know each other while Dr. King walks her mother across this gigantic airport to get to her gate for Chicago. It takes Dr. King about 25 minutes to escort her mother and then get back to her gate for Washington, and by that time Emily and Joltin’ Joe have made their way to the head of the line, almost on the plane. Joe wrangled her ticket for her and everything.

Dr. King thanks Joe profusely, and Joe walks away to get to his own gate. Just before he disappears down the broad hallway of that terminal, he turns around to give a giant salute, a wave, and a huge smile.

Mary-Claire and Emily make it to Washington, she successfully defends her proposal, she wins the grant from the NIH.<sup>3</sup> For the next 14 years, Dr. King works on the BRCA1 breast cancer gene that makes the cancer hereditary, until the genetic testing is perfected in 1996. She helps save thousands and thousands of lives.

Kindness seems like such a small virtue when you set it next to justice—a pebble next to a boulder, a MINI Cooper next to a Ford F650 Truck, a golf ball next to a basketball. But look what can happen if you’re kind. “Hi, Emily. I’m Joe.”

*Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?  
A nation turns its lonely eyes to you.*

“Justice is for the human family. Kindness is for our own family. St. Paul doesn’t quite say this, but almost: it is impossible to be loving and unkind at the same time.”

---

<sup>3</sup>Mary-Claire King, “The Week My Husband Left and My House Was Burgled I Secured a Grant to Begin the Project That Became BRCA1,” *The Huffington Post*, September 14, 2017. [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-maryClaire-king/brca-marriage-testing\\_b\\_17908074.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-maryClaire-king/brca-marriage-testing_b_17908074.html)

**—Prayers of the People—**  
**The Reverend Dr. Katie Snipes Lancaster**

You O God are with us, and we praise you. Our words of thanks tumble out: thanks for this good day, for the rain which nourishes, the community which gathers, the gift of life and breath within which in your boundless love buoys us.

Thanks and ever-thanks.

We are immersed in and infused with your love. We feel your gentle inner stillness tugging us, a crescendo of your holy company clarifying and centering us. Christ, we know your tender heart for neighbor and stranger, disciple and sojourner alike. On this day in this place, with your vast and embodied love, we ask that you draw us into your circle of light, a blessing to protect and heal and strengthen, a blessing to treasure, mend, and repair.

Hold and make holy the journey we have made to get to this place, to this day. And at the same time map a way forward. Chart a path into our own unknown, the future yet untraveled.

Let this moment of prayer strengthen us, instill hope within and a reminder that your presence goes with us, our bodies a temple of your own making.

Love is embodied here. Here within us. Let that love guide us.

Our own hearts are tender for the loved ones in our lives and so our prayers arise for their safekeeping. For vulnerable bodies made weak by illness, give health and wellbeing, healing, and freedom from suffering. For those in hospice, last days and hours drawing near, give gentle traveling partners, hands to hold, familiar voices at bedside who guide and wait, the most sacred waiting.

For those who descend into the mystery of memory loss, give the gentleness of committed care, dignity-wrapped custody, partnership, and deepest love.

For those who find themselves frustrated, angry, left out, unaccompanied, worried, spiraling, in need of something not yet found, let heartbreak fall away. Open your wide welcome and let them join your feast of love.

Beyond the small corner of our own lives, our own loved ones, our own troubles, we pray for the community, the city, the nation, and the globe. Fill the world God, with wise people who work in medicine, climate science, and green technology.

Create places of civility, justice, and responsibility.

Where thorny toxic politics, preventable suffering and humanitarian crisis hold sway, mark the way with people of kind heart and unerring affection, who will understand what is needed, find a sense of urgency, focus on the safety of children, and protect the most vulnerable.

For the people of Morocco, reeling from earthquake, for the people of Libya, searching for thousands of missing people after heavy rain, for the children in Yemen who lack safe water and so much more, we pray: Lord hear our prayer.

We trust you. We need you. We ask that you call us into service, so that we too might put our mark on this world, for the sake of your justice and love. So that we might follow you into your vision for this life. And now hear us as we pray: Our Father.... Amen.

*\*You may use these prayers for non-commercial purposes in any medium, provided you include a brief credit line with the author's name (if applicable) and a link to the original post.*

KENILWORTH UNION CHURCH  
211 Kenilworth Avenue, Kenilworth Illinois 60043  
847-251-4272 | [kuc.org](http://kuc.org)  
[facebook.com/kenilworthunionchurch](https://facebook.com/kenilworthunionchurch)