

**Kindness that leads you to Repentance**  
**Acts 17:22-34, Romans 2:1-4**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, have you told anyone recently that you love them?

When you put your kids to bed last night perhaps you tucked them in, kissed them goodnight and told them you loved them...

Perhaps as you left the house to go to work on Friday you gave your husband or wife a quick kiss and said “see you later dear, love you.”

Or maybe you said “lots of love” to a family member - a brother and sister or a parent or a young adult who is out of the house – as you finished off a phone conversation with them.

Or maybe you threatened to shout “I love you snookums” at your to-cool-for-school teenager, in front of all their friends,

while dropping them off at school, in your bathrobe, because it’s the only mode of discipline that seems to work with them.

Or maybe you cuddled your dog and scuffed their ears and scratched their belly and said “yes – you’re a good dog, I wuv you!”

So brothers and sisters have you told anyone recently that you love them?

Because it’s important to do that every once in a while, the significant people or pets, in your life need to hear it from you.

There’s the old joke about a wife who complained to her husband that he never told her that he loved her anymore. He replied “Well I told you I loved you when we got married didn’t I – when that changes I’ll let you know!”

But brothers and sisters, what do we mean when we say “I love you?”

The husband in the joke is thinking that saying I love you means “I’m committed to you” while the wife wants to hear “I love you” as an expression of fondness and affection and attraction.

So this brings up the question of what do we understand when someone says they love us?

And perhaps more applicable to our situation this morning, what do we understand when we hear someone say that “God loves us?”

Well brothers and sisters over the next four weeks we are going to look at what it means – specifically, from the scriptures - that God loves us.

And I can’t think of a better starting point for that than what Paul states in the second half of verse 4 in chapter 2 of his letter to the Romans – that God’s kindness is intended to lead us to repentance.

Now this is a good place to start because in chapters 1 and 2 Paul is making reference to all kinds of people who definitely need to hear that God loves them.

Maybe you caught a hint of this at the start of chapter 2 in vs. 1 when Paul says “*You therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else...*”

And if we are typical Canadians our first instinct would be to say – whoa we shouldn’t be judging someone else – and if we are Christians our first instinct is to say that we should be telling them that God loves them.

And if we go back to chapter 1:21-31 those “someone elses” Paul is referring to are idol worshippers, sexually immoral people, homosexuals and lesbians, people who are filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity, people who are God-haters, insolent, gossips, slanderers, people who invent ways of doing evil, even people who hate their parents and so on....

Now some of us might hear this list and say “Lord help those people they definitely need to be told that God loves them – they are such a mess!”

And other people might hear this list and say “well this is why I don’t like the bible and Christianity, because it just labels people and judges them, and so these people definitely need to hear that God loves them.”

And this is why, brothers and sisters, this passage is a good starting point for understanding what it means that God loves us....

Because it reveals our first instinct to contrast God’ love with judging, and thus show that many of us think that if we tell someone that God loves them what we mean is that God does not judge them – and therefore neither should we.

But then Paul makes another statement in vs. 2 – he says “*we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.*”

So contrary to our first instinct Paul is not contrasting judging against God’s love and thus giving these people a free pass from being judged by God.

Instead Paul’s contrast is meant to point out - to anyone who thinks they are morally superior -the hypocrisy of judging these other people for the things they do... when we ourselves do the same things!

And that’s exactly what he goes on to say in vs. 3 “*So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?*”

And we need to hear this brothers and sisters because another common understanding of what we mean when we say that God loves us, is that God is willing to overlook our faults because they are not really THAT terrible, especially compared to those other people.

We've not actually murdered anyone; we've never robbed a bank or stolen someone's car, we're not that bad.

But perhaps we need to be reminded how Jesus rebuked the Pharisees' false sense of moral superiority in their self-assurance of not having committed actual murder or adultery.

In Mat 5:21-22 Jesus says *"you have heard it said that anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment."*

And in vs.27-28 Jesus says *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*

So do you see how it's possible, that even though we may not think we do the exact same things – we are in fact, as Paul says, guilty of doing the same things.

Now I don't know about you, but I think this section of Romans describes very well the challenge of understanding what we mean when we say that God loves us within in our current context.

You see as Christians we know God's truth from scripture about what is right and wrong and pleasing to Him, but we live in a society where that truth is disregarded, suppressed and those who wish to live by it are mocked or persecuted.

So our temptation as Christians is to think we are a bit morally superior to our culture and we become judgmental and think that God loves us because we are obedient to Him...

Or, as a reaction to this judgmentalism, and because of intense social pressure and spirit of the age, we proclaim that God's love means there is no judgement and everyone is free to live as society deems fit.

And that's why Paul's statement in 2:4 is such a good starting point for addressing what it means that God loves us.

This statement speaks to both the unrighteous and the self-righteous and clarifies that the real issue is not who God loves – but reminding us that we need to know why God loves!

Paul states “[do you not realize] that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”

Now there four parts to this statement that we need to reflect upon and respond to.

The first is Paul’s question if we know what God’s kindness is for, do we realize it or not realize it – as he says in the verse. The second part is “God’s kindness,” the third part is how it “leads us” and the forth part is “repentance.”

So we kind of covered the first part already. What causes us to forget or not realize why God loves us is our own sinful reaction to other people’s sinfulness – it gets us sidetracked on who God loves, us or them, and how that is possible? Judgement or no judgement.

So let’s shift our focus back to the why by looking at what constitutes God’s kindness.

And since Paul is talking about God’s kindness in relationship to judgement I think the first example of God’s kindness we need to highlight comes from to Genesis 3.

This is where Adam and Eve have disobeyed God’s command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but instead of bringing the judgement of immediate biological death upon them, God seeks them out and mitigates the consequence of death – they will still live for a period of time, sustained by hard work and growing food.

And God provides them with clothing and gives them a promise that one of their children will defeat the serpent who tempted them into disobedience.

We typically think of Genesis 3 as a description all the terrible consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin – and that is true... but

how those consequences are mitigated is a great example of God's kindness.

That same kindness is expressed again in Genesis 8:21 when God makes His covenant with Noah after the flood.

*God says "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."*

So, in spite of humanity's sinfulness, God's kindness causes Him to declare that He will keep the Creation going and sustain it so that human being can flourish again.

That is why Jesus can say in Matthew 5:45 that God *"causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."* This is the kindness of God.

And Paul himself also describes the way in which God is kind to us when He was attempting to find common ground with the Greek Philosophers as he spoke to them in Athens. We read this scripture from Acts 17 this morning.

*Paul says "Rather, he [God] himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands."*

Paul is picking up the story from Noah here and attempting to find common ground by suggesting that the necessities which make life possible for humans are examples of God's kindness, just as he did when he was in Lystra in Acts 14:17.

*He says "[God] has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."*

And Paul also connects kindness with delayed judgement in his speech to the Greek Philosophers.

Going back to Acts 17:29-30 we see Paul say *“Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance...”*

So in broad strokes we can say that God’s kindness is His willingness to be merciful to us and delay judgment as well as His providence by which our very breath and life is sustained and made enjoyable in this world...

Now I will leave it up to you to apply these broad strokes to your own life to find instances of how you have personally experienced God’s kindness.

Now, brothers and sisters – please note that this kindness “leads” us. That is an important qualification to note.

Now when I think of being led I think about going somewhere that I haven’t been before, and being the shown how to get there because I don’t know the way, and having someone guide me so that I don’t get lost or sidetracked along the way.

That’s why we spent a bit more time reflecting on God’s kindness brothers and sisters – and why I encourage you to think about and reflect upon all those experiences of His kindness in your own lives.

It is this kindness which leads us from unrighteousness and/or self-righteousness to a place where we are able to turn away from those things.

This is not something we do to ourselves... God’s kindness shows us the way to get to a place of repentance when we don’t even know what that is like... when we’ve never been there before...

It is His kindness that keeps us on the path to get there or brings us back to that place when we get distracted along the

way by other people's unrighteousness or our own self-righteousness.

Now getting to a place of repentance means you come to a point where you change your mind, you turn away from one direction and face a new direction.

It is not primarily an emotional or a "spiritual" experience nor is it motivated from shame or guilt or regret or by personal effort – but as we have just learned, we are lead into this by God's kindness and... the conviction of the Holy Spirit that we do not want to show contempt for the riches and patients of God's kindness to us.

So my prayer this morning brothers and sisters is that through learning about and reflecting on God's kindness to us – the Holy Spirit would lead us in repentance and show each of us what it is that He will change our minds about and turn us away from in our lives.

It may be some form of unrighteousness that Paul lists in Romans 1 that you need to be lead away from – idolatry in some form, sexual immorality of some kind, or perhaps it is another form of lust, or pride, or greed, gluttony, envy, anger, or sloth...

That list of seven deadly sins is a good summary of how unrighteousness affects us and what we need to be turned away from and have our minds changed about.

Perhaps it is some form of self-righteousness that the Holy Spirit needs to change your mind on and turn you away from.

Maybe this is simply a recognition that your obedience to Jesus Christ and God's truth needs to flow out of a spirit of gratitude instead of a place of obligation and duty or attempting to show God that you are worthy or prove something to Him...

Maybe this is coming to a realization that if God were to judge you – you would discover you're not the nice kind moral



person that you think you are – you would find all sorts of unrighteousness hidden away in corners of your heart and mind and soul that you were not even aware of.

But most importantly brothers and sisters, as you are lead away from unrighteousness and self-righteousness I pray that God's kindness would lead you to the righteousness of Jesus Christ...

I pray that your mind will be changed to put your trust in Christ's righteousness and that your life will be turned around to live through Christ's righteousness so that when the day comes when we stand before God and He judges us - you will survive that judgement because of Christ.

And to help you remember this – I want to finish off this message about God's kindness with a little word play.

The Greek word for God's Kindness is the Greek is Xrestos – which is remarkably similar to the Greek for Christ: Xristos – this is an easy way to remember how kindness leads to Christ.

So brothers and sisters when you hear that God loves you, may you experience God's Xrestos leading you to repentance and to Xristos.

God loves you - Amen.