

**Sermon Notes:** February 13, 2022

**Theme:** Part 2 of Kind, Curious, Flexible: Curious

[Lectionary](#)

**Kindness, Curiosity and Flexibility** Like I said last week, everything we do in our faith community from social hour to social justice needs a spiritual support system. This support starts with kindness (see February 6<sup>th</sup> sermon notes). Curiosity is today's support practice. Curiosity is about looking for ways to celebrate people and their unique experiences. I will talk about the curiosity practice in more detail on the bottom of page 2. Lastly, next week, February 20<sup>th</sup>, will be about flexibility, which is sort of the easiest of the three pillars/practices because people who strive to be kind and curious naturally become more flexible.

**Stereotyping - the antithesis of curiosity** I am glad to have lived in Texas and California. Also, going back to Oklahoma this year was good for me. Those who are native Californians don't have the privilege of hearing the endless churn of stereotypes that Oklahomans and Texans spew about California.

An approach rooted in stereotypes is the enemy of curiosity. For example, when I first came from Texas to California people would ask (with a straight face) how many and what kind of guns I had. When I said that I have never owned gun, a few would follow up asking how many horses I had: also, none. I had to move to Danville to see elementary age kids riding horses to school!

Now that I have spent several years in California, going back to the South was uniquely funny this year. I lost track of how many times someone expressed concern about me living in the apocalyptic crash site that is California. One guy in Houston was genuinely annoyed with me, because "my" state had ruined the air outside his Colorado summer home during last year's fires.

There is a very common temptation to be *incurious*. It is not surprising because Curiosity takes energy. Stereotyping requires very little energy. It's like pressing play on an old tape deck. For my family of Oklahomans, the housing problems in the mission district; thefts in Walnut Creek; and last year's fire define *all* of California. If this narrow slice of disaster, crime and poverty were California, it really would not be as easy to live here.

So here is how I solved the stereotype /curiosity problem for myself. While in Texas and Oklahoma, one of my family members or a random acquaintance would start a conversation with a very predictable, "California, how do you live in that expensive, needle ridden, burning hellscape?" In response, I would say, "You know one of the things I love about California?... the turkeys." Without fail their eyes would cross in confusion and ask "wait, what?...turkeys?" It was so out their stereotype of Californian that they would be curious (if only momentarily). I would describe the experience of walking down El Pintado while the turkeys dance around and talk about hiking Las Trampas. At least a couple of people might have changed their mind ever so slightly. I am bravely battling stereotypes one turkey at a time.

**Essence** This is the heart of my exercise: whenever possible, insert humor and curiosity into human relationships. **Choose curiosity.** I chose to be deeply curious about my family's life. For example, my cousin's wife is a firefighter. She shared all sorts of interesting details about the unit that she works in. Sometimes they even carry Giger counters to a scene. I have known her for years and follow her on social media, but never would have heard the cool stories about her work, if I had

been *incurious* and settled for stereotypes, tropes, and my assumptions about her life.

**Curiosity in the Bible and culture** Curiosity gets a mixed review in scripture. Curiosity led to the fall, the tower of Babel, and other fun tragedies. Curiosity killed the proverbial cat.

It is true that our natural curiosity can lead us to some funky places. Qanon is a curiosity factory. The site is all about twisting our natural curiosity to show us a secret (completely made-up) world of shadowy elite who hurt children and engage in demonic acts. Curiosity can also be dangerous if you find yourself calculating the end of world by counting pages in your Bible. If your curiosity makes you feel superior because you know more about the knights templar than everybody else, then it is likely not holy. But holy curiosity seeks out beauty in others and builds bridges. Holy curiosity moves us forward, not inward.

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**Curiosity as a “New” Spiritual practice** Albert Einstein said, “I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.” I have nothing to say about the mysteries of the universe in this curiosity practice, but am laser focused on fellow humans.

The reset word for a curiosity practice is “new.” For you to be curious about people, you must be convinced they have something new to show you - something fresh. Last week I talked about “pass” where your memories get a pass that frees you to deal with life gently and kindly. This week, people are *new* because God is making them into a new creation. Choose to look for a fresh take on the person in front of you.

The next time you see someone, throw out a little silent prayer: “God, help me see the new” or just say to yourself, “new.” With this reset word, you can share a fresh experience with person you are talking to.

So, before you open your mouth, just say “new” to yourself. This micro-prayer can be powerful. It may not change the world. But, at least you will do no harm and not further dig a stereotypical rut. I think you will be surprised when you give curiosity a try. Paired with kindness, you can’t go wrong.

**Todd**