

Sermon Notes: February 6, 2022 **Theme:** Kind, Curious, Flexible [Lectionary](#)

By design, sabbaticals are a time to reframe and reset. They are sort of an active rest where one is freed to engage life and ministry differently. I have just completed my second sabbatical as a clergy person and am incredibly grateful to you as a community for this precious time.

With my family a little older and without the intensity of having small children in the home, this sabbatical has been far more meditative than the first. The first month in November was like a decompression tank. I was able to unhook from the last two years of priest-as-youtuber. The second month in December was an engaged prayer with lots of time in Texas and Oklahoma with family. The third month was when the magic happened. The silt of previously turbulent waters settled down, and I got to see the goodness and mercy following my days. I want to offer you a kindness practice on page 2 as a result.

This clarified water helped me see where spiritual goals support ministry goals. We still need stewardship campaigns. We still have ministries to maintain and create. We need many, many volunteers to make church work. The authentic engine underneath those mechanics is a grounded spiritual practice of *kindness, curiosity, and flexibility*.

Kindness, Curiosity and Flexibility Everything we do from social hour to social justice needs a spiritual support system. You can label it different ways, but I am choosing kindness, curiosity, and flexibility as the lens to look through. First, kindness is a way to get out of your own head. Instead of being swept off your feet by minor insults and inconveniences, you approach others with kindness (even if you don't feel like it). Second, curiosity builds on this consistent practice of kindness. You learn to walk in another person's shoes and appreciate their unique perspective. Finally, flexibility flows from the other two.

Upside down pandemic I think this tidy spiritual lens has been turned upside down during the pandemic. Flexibility was forced upon all of us, and kindness was in short supply during lines for toilet paper at Costco. Miraculously St. Timothy's did and continues to do amazing work where kindness is the norm. It was only by swimming upstream that we were able to survive and thrive, and it has taken enormous energy. So, if you are worn out from delta, omicron, N95, school emails, inflation, and the daily flow of destabilizing news, then you are normal. You need a new gift from God to practice kindness, curiosity, and flexibility.

Kindness I think I will spend the next three weeks trying to meditate on kindness, curiosity, and flexibility in turn. Kindness is this week. Curiosity will be on February 13 and finally flexibility will be on February 20.

Kindness is a practice and discipline. This discipline is for those we effortlessly enjoy, but that is "easy." The one who "grinds your gears" and irritates you is more important for your spiritual growth. As the scripture says: *love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them, expecting nothing in return. ... for God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked* (Luke 6:35).

Unkindness taints the whole batch. *Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.* 1 John 4:20. You cannot be brutal toward others and expect yourself to come out unscathed. 1st John does not

say this directly, but conversely you cannot be kind to others, while being brutal on yourself. Loving God, neighbor, and yourself is the only way your spirit will be sustained.

Kindness-as-antidote for rumination I offer you a practice that I taught myself. This practice is especially helpful for “ruminators.” If you are a ruminator, something you did 25 years ago pops up in your head and you replay and relitigate the whole thing as if it just happened. You relive the experience with all the emotions often more intense than the first run through.

A practical tool A kindness practice will short circuit this rumination cycle. As you go through your day, your brain won't stop, don't even try to stop it. Your brain was made to always be thinking. By its nature it won't stop, but can be redirected. When that insult you got from a family member; the mortifying thing you did in 7th grade; or the crash and burn you did at work comes on your mental radar, tell yourself “**Pass.**” You are not obliged to relitigate, relive, or rehash those old memories— you get a pass. Getting a pass frees your brain to work on being curious about others (more next week).

From the last six weeks of sabbatical, I would see an embarrassing event resurfacing, then I would simply say to myself “you get a pass.” Or just “pass.” Over time I started applying it to others. They too get a pass. Unless they are actively harming you or others, why not give them a pass? Holding them to account from something 10 years ago only hurts you and makes you less able to respond appropriately when the next problem comes up in real time.

The mystery of this kindness practice is that it has given me far more bandwidth to deal with unfinished business and the active problems that really need my attention. 95% of the stuff rolling around in our heads can't be changed – so give it a pass. This 95% approach makes us far more able to deal with the 5% that we can change. With this practice I get to clear off my emotional desk and prioritize the few things that need my attention instead of the blizzard of old memos that demand my attention but mean nothing for the future.

May you clear your desk, love yourself, love your neighbor, and love God. I am so glad to be back in the saddle and excited about how we move forward together.

Todd