



A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

The Milk of Human Kindness

Titus 3:1-8

His name was Danny, Danny Mac; he was a forklift driver and almost everything about him irritated me. Whenever he talked, which was pretty much all the time, he spit and sputtered so much that I always felt like I was taking a shower. Whenever he talked, which was pretty much all the time, he rambled on and on endlessly about things that were completely incomprehensible. In one sense, and I hate to admit this; in one sense, I held him in almost complete contempt. To my shame, I often spoke sharply to him; I made fun of him. I criticized almost everything he did and said. I thought of him as a bumbling, oafish, foul gutter rag of a man, which was made all the worse by the fact that he liked me enormously.

Whenever he saw me, he would go out of his way to greet me. He would always stick out his enormous, greasy hand and then proceed to tell me everything that had happened in his life since the last time he had talked and I had listened. Anyway, one hot August afternoon Larry Danner and I were sitting on the loading dock of the hardware warehouse where we worked, taking our afternoon break. As we sat, we drank cold grape sodas, talked theology and watched with some measure of consternation as Danny Mac whirled his forklift

around the dock picking up skids of spray paint and placing them on storage racks high overhead. He would then lower the forks of the forklift speed back to the next skid and repeat the process.

He was just about finished when he whirled around a corner and headed at much too high a speed to one of the last few skids. Someone yelled at him and instead of slowing down, Danny looked up. It was just a momentary distraction but I knew instinctively what was going to happen. The forks of Danny's forklift hit the skid he was racing toward just about knee high at just about twelve miles an hour. When the forks hit the skid they instantaneously ripped open a couple of hundred cans of royal blue Krylon spray paint and the pressurized paint blasted into the air forming a large blue, dense cloud of paint that swallowed up a large section of the warehouse, the forklift and its very surprised driver. Larry and I sat there with our mouths open in a state of complete bewilderment. After a minute or so, a bright blue figure emerged from the cloud of paint and staggered over to the dock door where Danner and I were seated. His skin was blue; his clothes were blue. His shoes were blue. He even left blue footprints on the floor of the warehouse as he walked over toward us. In fact, he was completely blue except for the whites of his very widely opened eyes. Finally he coughed out, **"Hey Tom, do you think anyone saw that?"**

I told him that no I didn't really see any reason why anyone should have noticed but that it might be a good idea go wash up before our break was over. I, and I say this to my shame, could not quit laughing. Finally, Danny staggered off. I turned to Larry to say something really clever when I noticed he was no longer laughing. He looked at me and then turned to watch Danny walk off and said, **"Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief."**

It ruined, as only Danner could do, a perfectly good comedic moment but now some twenty years later I remember it like it was yesterday. I remember it every time I meet someone who irks me, who tries my patience, who displays part of that inherent unloveliness that is associated with being a fallen, depraved reprobate of a sinner. You see Scripture makes it clear that we are fill the cup of every person we meet with the milk of human kindness and the reason we are to do that is because God lavished His kindness on us in Christ Jesus.

Let me say it a different way. The reason we ought to treat others with gentleness and kindness is because we have had the kindness of God poured out on us in Christ Jesus' justifying work. Or perhaps, it would be better to say it like this, **"The reason we ought to make every effort to put up with people's crud is because God forgave our crud, that is our sin and corruption, in Jesus."**

You see that is the point, Paul is making here is Titus 3 and he is not pulling any punches. Earlier in the book, he had made it a point to tell Titus to encourage his listeners to manifest kindness to each other. Now Paul wasn't the least bit naïve about the kind of people Titus had under his charge. He knew what the inhabitants of the island of Crete were like. In chapter one, Paul had written...

^{NIV} **Titus 1:12**...Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons."

That is why Paul took such pain to remind Titus of his obligation to encourage Cretan believers to be kind to each other. He wanted them to be kind to each other so that Christianity would seem attractive to unbelievers. But here he is

telling Titus to remind his hearers to not only show kindness to fellow believers but to go beyond that, far beyond that by showing kindness and gentleness to unbelievers as well. Look at how Paul says what he says in Titus 3:1.

^{NIV} **Titus 3:1**...Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,

Now I do realize that Paul starts off by talking about subjection to rulers and authorities but I don't want to talk about that this morning. The reason I don't want to talk about it is because it seems to me that there are two separate ideas going on here. The first thought is that Titus ought to remind his listeners to in subjection to authorities; the second thought (which really starts in verse 2) is that that Titus ought to remind his listeners to show every possible kindness to all men.

It is that second idea that I want to focus on this morning. That second idea seems to be framed by the little phrase "good deeds". Notice that "good deeds" occurs at the end of verse 1 and also down in verse 8. Here's what I think Paul is doing. I think he started off encouraging Titus to remind his listeners to be obedient to authorities over them. He then wrapped up that command by saying, "In fact, what I want you to do is to be ready to do every kind of good deed. Now, in case there is any doubt, here's what I mean by good deeds." Then in verse two, Paul explains to Titus just what he means by "good deeds". Look at it...

^{NIV} **Titus 3:2**...to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

I love the three words Paul uses here. He approaches two of the ideas negatively (that is, "Don't do this.") and the third positively (that is, "Do this."). Now remember these three commands all occur under the general rubric. "Be ready to do every good deed."

Anyway, his first command is **"to malign no one."** The verb, in Greek, is the verb from which we get the English word **"blaspheme"**. Here's Paul's point, **"Don't blaspheme anyone; that is, don't be a slanderer."** I think Paul puts this one first because of the universality of this sin. I do not know how many times I have spoken ill of people or heard others speak ill of people they knew. I do not know what it is in the heart of sinful humanity that gains satisfaction from trashing other people but there is something there. There is something in our sinful hearts that finds fulfillment in the maligning of someone else's good name. We couch our sin in careful terms, of course. **"Brother, would you pray with me for such and such a stupid, reprobate"** but our intention is to hurt, to destroy or even worse to somehow make ourselves feel more spiritual, more holy by contrasting their wickedness with our own good, self-righteousness.

Paul tells Titus to tell the Cretans, **"Stop, don't do that anymore."** Then he tells Titus to remind them **"to be uncontentious."** That is, he tells them **"Don't be fighters."**

Not only, are the Cretans not to speak evil of people; they are not to be prone to fight. Now the verb that is used here is one used to describe hand-to-hand combat without weapons. Here's Paul's point, **"Don't jump on people. Don't be so all-fired consumed with winning your fights. Don't be so all-fired desperate to prove you are right and the other person wrong."**

You know this is a particular point of instruction that I find extremely painful. I don't know how many times I have seen other people rush to straighten someone else out. I don't know how many times I have done so myself. I don't know how many times I have seen good and noble Christians jump on some poor well-meaning waiter or waitress simply because their service was slow or their fork was dirty or the check was miscalculated.

But here's what Paul is saying, **"Stop! Don't do that anymore. Don't walk around with your back up. Don't lay in wait to get even. Don't walk around with a chip on your shoulder. Don't be so all-fired ready to lash out."**

Instead, Paul tells Titus to remind his hearers to be people who are characterized by gentleness. The word that Paul uses here for "gentleness" is translated in Philippians 4 as **"forbearing spirit"**. I like that. Another translation renders it as **"sweet reasonableness."** I think I like that even better. What Paul is saying is this, **"Start doing this! Have this kind of disposition. Be the kind of person who goes around pouring out the milk of human kindness on everyone they meet."**

Now, in case there is any doubt that that is what Paul meant look at the last phrase of verse 2.

^{NIV} **Titus 3:2**...and to show true humility toward all men.

These commands that Paul is giving to Titus are not to be directed toward believers. They are to be directed toward unbelievers. That is what Paul means

by **“all men”**. What he is saying is this, **“Don’t slander other people, not even unbelievers; don’t be so all-fired ready to fight or to straighten people out. Instead be gentle; show people, all people as much as you all able, every courtesy. Defer to others.”**

Now by extend courtesy and by being deferential Paul is talking about more than just being polite. He is talking about actively taking second place to others even when they don’t deserve it. He is talking about extending every courtesy even to people that just don’t get it. Let me see if I can illustrate what I mean.

In her book, *Character Above All*, Peggy Noonan, an ex-speechwriter for Ronald Reagan, tells a story about Frances Green. Frances was an eighty-three year old woman who lived by herself on Social Security in a town just outside San Francisco. She had little money, but for eight years she’d been sending one dollar a year to the Republican National Convention.

Then one day Frances got an RNC fund-raising letter in the mail, a beautiful piece on thick, cream-colored paper with black-and-gold lettering. It invited the recipient to come to the White House to meet President Ronald Reagan. She never noticed the little RSVP card that suggested a positive reply needed to be accompanied by a generous donation. She thought she’d been invited because they appreciated her dollar-a-year support. Frances scraped up every cent she had and took a four-day train ride across America. Unable to afford a sleeper, she slept sitting up in coach. Finally she arrived at the White House gate: a little elderly woman with white hair, white powder all over her face, white stockings, an old hat with white netting, and an all-white dress, now yellow with age.

When she got up to the guard at the gate and gave her name, however, man frowned, glanced over his official list, and told her that her name wasn't there. She couldn't go in. Frances Green was heartbroken. A Ford Motor Company executive who was standing in line behind her watched and listened to the little scenario. Realizing something was wrong, he pulled Frances aside and got her story. Then he asked her to return at nine o'clock the next morning and meet him there. She agreed. In the meantime, he made contact with Anne Higgins, a presidential aide, and got a clearance to give her a tour of the White House and introduce her to the president. Reagan agreed to see her, of course?

The next day was anything but calm and easy at the White House. Ed Meese had just resigned. There had been a military uprising abroad. Reagan was in and out of high-level secret sessions. But Frances Green showed up at nine o'clock, full of expectation and enthusiasm. The executive met her, gave her a wonderful tour of the White House, then quietly led her by the Oval Office, thinking maybe, at best, she might get a quick glimpse of the president on her way out. Members of the National Security Council came out. High-ranking generals were coming and going. In the midst of all the hubbub, President Reagan glanced out and saw Frances Green. With a smile, he gestured her into his office.

As she entered, he rose from his desk and called out, **"Frances! Those darn computers, they fouled up again! If I'd known you were coming I would have come out there to get you myself."** He then invited her to sit down, and they talked leisurely about California, her town, her life and family.

The president of the United States gave Frances Green a lot of time that day—more time than he had. Some would say it was time wasted. But those who say

that didn't know Ronald Reagan. He knew this woman had nothing to give him, but she needed something he could give her. And so he (as well as the Ford executive) took time to be kind and compassionate. (Taken from *The Tardy Ox Cart* by Chuck Swindoll)

I love that. I love because it is so crystal clear. But just in case there might be some doubt about whether we really ought to be about such kindness, Paul goes on to give the reason why we ought to be kind to all men. Look at verse 3.

^{NIV} **Titus 3:3**...At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Do you get what he is saying? He is saying, **“Look here. We used to be just like they are now. We used to be foolish ourselves and we acted out our ignorance. We were disobedient, wandering around deceived and simultaneously so consumed with our own selfish desires that we were eaten up with bitterness and envy over what other people had and enjoyed. In fact we were so envious and malicious that our lives were characterized by hatefulness, we even hated those have long since become our brothers and sisters. But then something happened. Something changed everything and that something was God breaking through our sin and defilement and giving us new hearts and new minds.”** That something was the kindness of God being displayed to us in the saving act of Jesus. That's where he turns in verse 4...

^{NIV} **Titus 3:4**...But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that,

having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Now this particular verse doesn't come across very well in our English Bible. It seems like it is answering the question, "**How was that kindness shown?**" But it really isn't principally concerned with that. The emphasis is really on the temporal aspect of this wonderful kindness we've been shown. In other words, the verse is mostly concerned with the timing of God's kindness to us and that kindness appeared to us when we were still in our sins. It occurred to us when we didn't have any good deeds to commend us to God and because of that it was an act based entirely in God's mercy and that is exactly the point Paul seems to be making. God displayed his kindness and mercy to us when we were unlovable. He displayed His kindness and compassion to us not because there was anything in us that attracted Him or aroused His admiration. **No, it wasn't like that at all.**

He loved us and showed compassion to us out of pity and that is exactly what Paul wants us to do to unbelievers. He doesn't want us maligning them or fighting with them. Instead he wants us to be gentle showing every possible consideration and he wants us to do that because that is exactly what he did for us in Jesus. Just in case anyone thinks this is the small stuff of the Christian life Paul adds an important verse down in verse 8. Look what he says there.

^{NIV} **Titus 3:8**...This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Do you get what he is saying? He is saying, **“This is the big stuff.”** He is telling to Titus to keep before believer’s eyes the kindness of God toward them in Christ so that they will be careful to treat unbelievers with sufficient kindness and gentleness to make Christ attractive. He is saying that if God’s kindness doesn’t impact you enough to treat unbelievers with a measure of the milk of human kindness that you may not understand the kindness of God at all.

I imagine you already know the story of the American ship, the USS Indianapolis that delivered the atomic bomb to Guam and was then consequently sunk by a Japanese submarine at the end of World War 2. It was a story that was made famous in our generation by the movie “Jaws.” When the ship sank some 800 American sailors went into the water and of that 800 only 300 or so eventually survived. The rest, all of the rest, died of thirst or were eaten by sharks or drown as they floated four days and nights in the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. Finally, a pilot flying a small seaplane spotted them and dropped them down some rubber life rafts and water. Of course, most of the containers of water burst as they hit the ocean. Anyway one of the survivors, a medical officer named Lewis Haynes help put the sickest people inside the life rafts and the others hung onto ropes outside the life rafts as they waited for the seaplanes to come and rescue them. Finally, Haynes found one small flask of water that hadn’t burst. It had a little one-ounce cup attached and began to dole out the water. Haynes said and I don’t think I shall ever forget this.

I doled out the water, passing the cup down hand to hand. Each man passed it to his neighbor being careful not to spill one single precious drop. Not one man cheated event though they were dying of thirst. (Lewis L. Haynes...*On the Sinking USS Indianapolis*) You know I cannot get that thought out of my mind.

Feeble hands holding out the water of life spurred on by gratitude to defer to others worse off than themselves. They restrained their own thirsts and showed every consideration to the next man down the way. Shouldn't we do the same to those who have not know the mercy we've known by offering them what we can of the milk of human kindness.

Let's pray.