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A Kind Act Makes a World of Difference

By The Rev. Rachel Rickenbaker

“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”

I was brought back to these words I’d heard, but whose author is unknown, just the other night in the grocery store as I went through the checkout line. I decided to make some light conversation with the cashier and simply asked how his evening was going.

He told me a little about how his shift had gone, and then said, “I really appreciate you making conversation. It helps make my shift more enjoyable. Most customers come through and avoid eye contact or conversation. Then, it just feels awkward, and the night seems long.”

That simple interaction has made me think a lot about both the impact of this pandemic on people and these divided times in our nation. I fear that in this past year, we have become desensitized in some ways to other people. Perhaps it’s because we feel safer keeping to ourselves in light of the possibility of contracting illness from others. Perhaps it’s because it seems

easier to numb ourselves to the immense grief our world feels than to open ourselves to the possibility of others' pain.

It was overwhelming to me to realize that for every toll of the Bourdon Bell at the National Cathedral last Tuesday, it was not just one life, but one thousand lives lost to the deadly COVID-19 virus.

I fear, also, we have become so politically divided in these times that we tend to categorize others as "red" or "blue," rather than seeing them as human beings made in God's image. So, we might choose just to keep to ourselves and focus on taking care of ourselves and those in our immediate household rather than spend energy on anyone else in our path.

The truth is, however, that no matter how people seem to be doing on the outside, every single person is going through their own battle. It is hard for us to see that when we often only see the outside of a person.

Jesus had the ability to see inside a person's heart, truly to see each person with eyes of compassion. Even when a rich man, who to the world might have seemed like he had it all together, approached Jesus, Scripture tells us that Jesus "gazed upon him and felt genuine love for him" (Mark 10:21). Jesus saw the rich man for who he was, and despite the man's shortcomings, Jesus loved him. In fact, Jesus loved him so much that he went to the cross for him and indeed for the *whole world*, that we would be free of the burdens of sin and death forever.

Kindness is not about liking or agreeing with every person you meet. It is not about turning a blind eye to injustice. Jesus was compassionate, but truthful, and sometimes, that truthfulness led him to ask critical questions about the way things were.

Often, it is most difficult to be kind when the other person seems undeserving of kindness – maybe because they've not first acted with kindness towards us. Sometimes, kindness will even make certain people angry because they wish instead to sow seeds of discord.

When you share an act of kindness, it is a way of recognizing that the one with whom you are interacting is another human being with their own battles and is equally loved by God. It could be your act is the only act of kindness a

person experiences in their day. Or, that your act of kindness is enough to make a person realize that they are worth more than they know. You might just find that through your act of kindness, God changes you, as well.

I share this quote on kindness from one of my favorite theologians and saints, Mr. Fred Rogers:

"Imagine what our real neighbors would be like if each of us offered, as a matter of course, just one kind word to another person. There have been so many stories about the lack of courtesy, the impatience of today's world, road rage, and even restaurant rage. Sometimes, all it takes is one kind word to nourish another person. Think of the ripple effect that can be created when we nourish someone. One kind empathetic word has a wonderful way of turning into many."