

What word would you use to explain what it is to be kind? A hand was raised, “Good” Then another hand would be in the air – “Nice” . Kind means nice– that is about as good a definition as you can expect from three, four and five year olds. I was with the eight pre-school classes that meet each week at Christ Lutheran Nursery school. Kindness was the fruit of the Spirit I was explaining this month.

I asked, “Who in this circle has been kind to you? Go and tap that person on the shoulder.” In each group some did - got up - went across the room and gave a little tap. The face of the one tapped lit up – it is quite an honor to be declared a kind one. But sometimes I noticed a look of disappointment when the one who had tapped the shoulder of another did not receive a tap in return.

That is kind of what happened that day in Nazareth. Jesus had read from the prophet Isaiah that the Lord had anointed him to proclaim good news to the poor recovery of sight to the blind, release to the captives. He declared “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. Kind of a tap on Jesus’ shoulder. “Is this not Joseph’s son?” they asked. Hometown boy made good.

But Jesus did not return the tap. He might have said, “I thank all of you for all you gave me growing up. I owe it all to you.” That’s what we would like to hear when one from among us makes it big. But these were Jesus’ words: “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, Doctor, cure yourself! Do here in your hometown the things that we have heard that you did in Capernaum. Truly I tell you no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.”

Jesus spoke of two times when the Lord reached out to people who were not Israelites. And the people of Jesus’ hometown were filled with rage – drove him out of town and wanted to kill him. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

I have never understood Jesus’ words in this story. Just when it seemed that the people were all on his side Jesus seems to reject them. That just does not seem like the Jesus I know. Jesus seems to intentionally provoke them.

Sue and I were in Africa earlier this month. Tanzania is a poor country. In the rural areas people live in homes made of mud. Some of the roofs are of grasses or leaves. Along the roads are people walking – pushing carts or even more often a bicycle loaded with all that can be balanced on it. Missionaries told us of hunger in the area around the city where our daughter, Beth, lives. After three years of drought many children had died. As we passed through the land again and again I thought of God and how God must see this people. I wondered that God could love one of these poor ones as much as God loves me. I found it hard to believe.

Was it hard for the people of Nazareth to believe that this hometown boy would not center all his attention on them? In their minds they were the most important ones. But Jesus would be bringing the love of God to others.

On the plane traveling to Africa I read a book on global warming. I read that one fourth of all the carbon that is being released into the atmosphere is released by the people of the United States. The book declared that it is likely that the weather in the very places we were visiting would become more unstable, more droughts, more floods. I kept asking myself, “If my way of living harms these poor people would I be willing to change. Turn off my air conditioning, get rid of one of our cars, use less heat and power? I could hardly imagine giving up something for them.

I am not so different from those people of Nazareth. Take care of things at home first. Do what it takes to protect our future even if it is costly to these poor people I was seeing.

Jesus may not be seeing things from my perspective. Jesus may not think that my comforts and my entertainment and my security are more important than Christians who gather in a mud church in Tanzania. Should I demand that Jesus change – that God see everything with me in the center? Or will I repent – let Jesus change me so that I can see myself and others from God’s perspective?

In the second lesson Paul writes of love. “Though I speak in the language of mortals and angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and

all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, and do not have love, I gain nothing.

Will we be a people who love? Will we seek the good of those who live in far lands or that will follow in future generations or will we seek only our own desires?

Jesus came to give his life in love. He did not save his life or protect it but offered himself for us. He invites you to follow. Amen.