

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

Readings: Hebrews 13: 1-3

Matthew 25: 31-40

If you Google “Random acts of kindness” you’ll find lots of websites to do with it, many of them American, but I first came across it when they talked about it on Radio 4 and then on the TV. Random acts of kindness are not to do with showing kindness to people you know, nor are they about doing things to impress others. They are about doing things for people you don’t know at all, random people.

Some real examples:

* Somebody leaving a car park found that the person in front had paid for him/her as well.

* A woman who had parked in a car park realised that she hadn’t paid enough to park. When she got back to the car, she found a note on the car and a new ticket. The note said, “I saw you were going to run out, so I bought you a new one.”

* A person who grew vegetables left them on the kerb for people to take. When people rang the doorbell and asked to pay, she/he said that she didn’t want payment.

* On a British “Random acts of kindness” website this week there was a photo of a young couple with their toddler, and a note on the website saying, “A memory stick has been found in the Farnham area with these photos on. Please help to reunite the stick with its owner.”

* “At about 4.30 this afternoon I had a flat tyre, and went to change my wheel for the spare, and the spare was flat too. A stranger appeared as I discovered this and he cycled 3 miles

home, got his car and took one of my wheels to a tyre place and replaced it for me, so I could get home with my 7 month old son. As I didn't have my wallet on me, he paid for the replacement tyre, so I could get home and feed my son. I returned his money, a thank you card and a bottle of wine to him. My husband is in the Royal Navy and currently away at sea, so I have to be able to do things and sort things out on my own sometimes. This act of kindness floored me; I'm so humbled that this stranger took 2 hours out of his day to help me. I would do the same for a stranger too."

Have you experienced kindness like this?

I don't want this to be about being twee, "spreading the love", being nice, "Smile and the world will smile with you" sort of thing. What struck me about "random acts of kindness" is that it's almost exactly a definition of "grace". One of the meanings of "Grace" in the Bible is "God's favour when it's not deserved", and the Bible calls on us to experience this grace and to show that same grace to other people. Yes, God's favour or kindness is not random because God knows each of us, but it is random in the sense that He shows it to anyone and we can't earn it or deserve it. And there's a WOW about grace, about God allowing his Son to die for us in a supreme act of kindness, just as those people who experience random acts of kindness are bowled over, taken aback by it when we show God's grace randomly to others.

Now I'm not a patient, kind person, especially when I'm out shopping in Maidstone or when I'm driving. I get irritated by people meandering around supermarkets; with their trolleys and getting in my way; stopping and talking to people in the middle of the pavement, trying to jump the queue in Wetherspoons, or people being rude. And in the car: people

who squeeze past me when two lanes become one, who potter along at 25 in a 40 mph speed area, who refuse to give way when they are supposed to, or who park over two parking bays. They irritate me even though I know I am sometimes guilty of the same things; in fact, knowing that I sometimes do the same things only irritates me more! So I can easily get stuck in a grouchy, moany frame of mind: "Everybody's in my way or rude or about to do something stupid." It's the Victor Meldrew syndrome. God doesn't ask us to see people as nice or as deserving kindness - they often aren't nice and don't deserve kindness - just like me! But God says that we should do random acts of kindness, acts of grace, because people matter to Him. Instead of looking at people from out of a frown, expecting them to irritate me, I need to look for ways of doing things for them - for people I don't know. Instead of thinking, "What can I get out of doing? Can I avoid doing something?", I can look for things to do for people. Surprise them - and it will! I've found that when I've started doing this, it's taken me out of my grumpy frame of mind and changed my outlook completely. And isn't it the way God sees us, looking for ways to show us his favour? I can't say I do it all the time because it requires effort, but it's worth doing. Even a smile to someone in the street, or holding the door open for someone can make a difference.

The "Random acts of kindness" movement is not particularly Christian or religious. Listen to this: "The time has come when we cannot just rely on others to make the world a better place - each one of us has to do our bit. It is time for people to be more and more aware about their PSR (personal social responsibility)". This sounds like a secular person finding long words to do what Christians ought to be doing already, showing the grace we experience from God. Non-Christians often put us to shame, perhaps because they

realise that it depends on them, whereas maybe we Christians put the onus onto God and duck out ourselves.

Let's let ourselves be amazed again at what God has done and continues to do for us, and let's show that to others in random acts of kindness. It will change our attitude completely!

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