

Acts 27:39 – 28:2  
No Ordinary Kindness  
Joe Huizenga

<sup>39</sup>When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. <sup>40</sup>Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. <sup>41</sup>But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

<sup>42</sup>The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. <sup>43</sup>But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. <sup>44</sup>The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.

**28** Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. <sup>2</sup>The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.

Nineteen years old, pregnant, bruised eye, busted lip, a gray hooded sweatshirt covering her head, Corali walked into the office of Roseland Christian Ministries and whispered to no one in particular, "I need a place to stay."

Expressionless, she said again,

"I need a place to stay."

A staff member welcomed her, showed her to a table to sit, and Corali filled out the application.

She was shown to her room, given a bath towel, wash cloth, a fresh change of clothes, and new linens for her bed.

Kadie Verstate, our shelter director, introduced Corali and I.

I reached my hand out to shake hers.

She stood stone faced and silent never reaching out to shake my hand.

After a hot shower and change of clothes, she shut her bedroom door to the first night of calm and quiet in months.

The next morning she knocked on Kadie's office door.

She inhaled a deep breath of air, her eyes welled up as she stared now into Kadie's eyes, when finally a single tear fell down her cheek.

And for the next few hours-Coralie wept and told her story.

Well it was two years later this past February on a cold Saturday morning, when Coralie, no longer living at RCM, was using the kitchen facilities at RCM to bake a cake for her two-year-old daughter's birthday party.

Coralie's eyes twinkled and danced, her bright smile greeted me, she put down the spoon that she was smearing birthday frosting with, and she wiped pink frosting off her hand and reach out her hand to me.

She invited anybody and everybody to make it to her daughter's birthday party later that day.

The transformation in Coralie, in her disposition and demeanor, the light that was in her eyes was nothing short of remarkable.

She came through the doors of RCM traumatized to the point of being unwilling and unable to make eye-contact, human connection, and touch and two years later she was hosting a birthday party for her daughter, baking a cake, inviting everybody, even strangers to celebrate with her.

Now what's also true is that she is more than those two extremes-she has been on the streets, she's a survivor, and there are some defense mechanisms, ways of being in relationship, and habits that have formed deep grooves into who she is. Coralie, like you and I, is still on the journey.

But the change in Coralie from detached indifference and hardness to engaged joy-filled kindness has pressed my soul to consider the transformational power of love when lived out in the kindness of grace filled community.

The world needs that kind of power and that kind of transformation because there is a whole lot of hurt,

Willie James Jennings, former president of Yale Divinity writes,

"There is a loneliness born of trial and trauma that attaches itself to body and mind pressing us to turn toward despair."

Trauma has the power to turn people away from connection to one other, close us off, and lead people to despair and disconnection.

Boys and girls sit in classrooms across the city of Chicago with empty desks down their aisle because classmates have been gunned down. Trauma.

Undiagnosed mental illness in men, women, children left to fend for themselves on the streets bouncing from abandoned building, to sleeping in a car, bus stop, to a shelter, to an hour of warmth on a church pew on a Sunday morning. Trauma.

Generational addiction. Trauma.

A boy born a ward of the state, beaten in a foster home, grows up, spends a decade in prison, and is now a grown man, hungry and waiting in line for a plate of food at RCM talking out the voices in his head as he waits in line. Trauma.

Every single day at RCM, there is a community of people that have been traumatized by poverty, violence, systemic racism, abandonment, mental illness, and addiction. Trauma.

RCM Board member Tracey Stelley is the principal at Lavizzo Elementary school just two blocks west of RCM on 109<sup>th</sup> street. Lavizzo Elementary is a great school it is the only International Baccalaureate school in the 60628 zip code –they have had students travel from Roseland to Japan. They teach different languages, they test high on standardized tests. This past November, 14-year-old student Kevin Tinker was gunned down. Two days later Kevin’s mother was shot and killed on her way to light a candle for her son. Trauma.

Trauma has the power to disconnect and lead to more and more despair.

Brene Brown writes:

Of all the things trauma takes away from us, the worst is our willingness, or even our ability, to be vulnerable. There’s a reclaiming that has to happen.”

The only thing that opens the door to our ability to be vulnerable is God’s love lived out daily by the power of the spirit in extraordinary kindness. Or from the words of our baptisms we love because God first loved us.

And because of God’s great love for us, and the power of God’s Spirit. we love-daily.

Martin Luther King said, “To like is a sentimental thing.”

But to love is a decision and a commitment.

Thomas Aquinas wrote, “To love is to will the good of another.”

What binds us together here in this room this morning then is the belief that there is transformative power in committing our lives to welcoming broken brothers and sisters into community where pain is acknowledged, people’s humanity is affirmed, and the Spirit of God pushes us to love neighbor as ourselves.

Again from Willie James Jennings:

“Only a Word of life can silence the loneliness born of trauma. A word found in other believers who understand the power of grace-filled invitation and hospitality.”

That is our call.

So what does that look like?

But what is the ongoing act or disposition that we can inhabit.

In the Bible, in the book of Acts, the apostle Paul is imprisoned aboard a boat on the Mediterranean Sea. The boat crashes and the prisoners are thrown into the roiling waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Paul and the prisoners are washed ashore on the Island of Malta.

They have been traumatized by weapon and wave. And now they are encircled by the native people of Malta. I imagine Paul and the other prisoners laying in the sand, coughing up salt water, while the Maltese people encircle them with spears pressed at their necks.

And yet the story doesn't go in that direction.

Acts 28:2, the New King James version:

“the native people showed us *no ordinary kindness*, for they kindled a fire and received us every one, because of the present rain and because of the cold.”

As in the rest of Acts, the Holy Spirit is out in front of the believers, working through the hospitable grace filled kindness of those whom are neither Jew or Christian.

One writer puts it this way:

“The Maltese’s action toward the shipwrecked was a surprise of grace and kindness that would be repeated in so many other contexts and with so many other peoples in the centuries that followed, and the church has never learned to see such kindnesses for what they actually are—signs of the Spirit’s presence with people’s as a precursor to a holy joining be orchestrated by God.”

Paul is shown no ordinary kindness, refuge from the rain, warmth from the cold, perhaps a little something to eat, and he is able to keep on the journey.

And it is our calling as God’s people to build, sustain, encourage, and support communities that show in their life, that live out, “no ordinary kindness to whomever God sends”—for these are the places that have the potential to transform and connect and build those who are traumatized in this world.

Paul shipwrecked on the shores of Malta,

Coralie and her two-year-old daughter

And my guess is you are here today because in some way you experienced the love of God in community, you are here because you experienced no ordinary kindness in the act of member from Hope, Pullman, or Roseland.

I want to share one last story that for myself and a few others has been an example of showing “no ordinary kindness.”

Lisa has been on the streets going on three decades. Short, a crooked leg, she would walk up and down Michigan Avenue in the grip of an unforgiving addiction.

Three decades on the street has taken a toll on her body.

She scratches her neck and arms.

Her hands shake as she has little control of them.

She has difficulty speaking-her words mangled and she can spit when she speaks.

This past winter she had had enough of being in the cold and she banged on the outside door one night asking for a place to stay.

The staff person upstairs in the shelter did the same thing.

Gave her a fresh set of linens, some towels, and some clothes.

Lisa took a shower. Got into her warm clothes and she began to take the first steps to care for herself again.

She took a comb and began to comb her hair.

She as she tried her hands and arms trembled.

She struggles and couldn't physically get her arms to her head or control her hand to comb her own hair.

Anita Williams, RCM shelter staff, saw her struggling and said,

"Baby come here and sit down."

Lisa looked at Anita with great suspicion but after Anita asked her again relented-and sat down in front of her.

Anita took the comb, worked some product into Lisa's hair and for the next 20 minutes combed her hair.

As God in Christ Jesus has shown us no ordinary kindness, may we be filled with or catch up with, wherever it is the Spirit is showing no ordinary kindness.

Amen.