

Words to Live By – January 15, 2018

A Word to Change the World

5 things to know about kindness

by Rev. Dr. Sonja Tobey

I always think about the title of this column—Words to Live By—as I begin to formulate what to write when it is my turn in the writing rotation. *What is the word to live by that I can bring this week?* This time I reflected on what will make a difference in 2018. It is a helpful spiritual practice to have a word to meditate on all year long—a word of the year if you will. For 2018, I would like to propose a word to you that can and does change the world. Are you ready? **KINDESS**. Here are five things to know about **KINDNESS**:

- 1. Kindness is something that applies to all and can be done by anyone.** Kindness doesn't require a bank account or an education. People from all economic and social classes can be kind. It isn't unique to any one religion. People from all political persuasions can (and should) practice it. No skill is required. Anyone, literally anyone, and be kind.
- 2. Showing kindness impacts our disposition.** This should go without saying, but I will anyway. When we show kindness to others, it is a boost to us also. We are programmed to be happy when we brighten someone's day. Col. 3:12 tells us we are to clothe ourselves with kindness, as well as compassion, meekness, humility, and patience. Just like new clothes can make us feel better, clothing ourselves with these things affects our outlook.
- 3. Kindness is one of the ways we are known as God's people, Spiritual people.** Spiritual fruit, or the product of the Spirit working in us, is listed in Gal. 5 as love, joy, peace, patience, *kindness*, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Showing kindness is one of the greatest witnesses to our faith, and being unkind can be one of the strongest ways we push people away from God.
- 4. Kindness is a description of love.** Love is patient. Love is *kind*. 1 Corinthians 13:4a. In the gospels we are told to love God and neighbor. Among other things, kindness describes this love. Being kind to another, whether we know them or not, shows love of neighbor.
- 5. One kind word can change someone's life.** In one community I lived in, the greeter at the door of the Walmart was a dour man, who rarely spoke let alone smiled or made people feel welcomed. I took it as my personal mission to make that man smile when I walked through the door. It took a few months, but each time I came in, the corners of his mouth curled up ever so slightly. I called it a win.

I recently read an article saying the nice things you think about people to them. I became more intentional in my efforts to compliment complete strangers on something. Their shoes or clothes. A kind act I noticed. I tried this during the crazy

time in stores when folks are Christmas shopping. I do not always remember to do that, because I like everyone else get caught up in my life. But I have found it to be a worthwhile endeavor. And I believe the effort I make has an impact on others as well. People to whom someone has shown kindness, will show kindness to others.

So, this year, change the world! Make kindness a deliberate and intentional practice. Throw kindness around like confetti! And celebrate the times you get it right by smiling broadly at the next person you see.