"THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS...KINDNESS..."
(Galatians 5:22)

Pilgrim Church, Duluth October 13, 1974 Dr. Royal F. Shepard, Jr.

"Who is Silvia? what is she,
That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair, and wise is she;
The heaven such grace did lend her,
That she might admired be.

Is she kind as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness.
Love doth to her eyes repair,
To help him of his blindness,
And, being help'd, inhabits there.

Then to Silvia let us sing,
That Silvia is excelling;
She excels each mortal thing
Upon the dull earth dwelling:
To her let us garlands bring."

"Is she kind as she is fair?" In Shakespeare's day the word "kind" still kept a meaning that in our day has almost disappeared from view. "Kind" meant "natural." To be kindly, therefore, was to act in a way that was true to human nature. Silvia's beauty was free from artificiality. It was a beauty too that linked up with a love that was sincere. The connection between being natural and being kindly in the modern sense comes out in this definition from my huge old Webster's dictionary:

"Having feelings befitting our common nature."

Perhaps the best way to sum up this connection is to say that kindness grows out of a sense of kinship. The similarity between "kind" and "kinship", of course, is no accident. Kindness is a way of treating other people, and indeed, other kinds of creatures, that comes from the sense of a common bond. It is rooted in empathy, in our capacity to feel what others feel and to put ourselves in their place.

The good Samaritan in Jesus' parable was a man who showed this sense of kinship and empathy. Even though they shared the same culture and the same religion, the priest and the Levite were able to make believe that the wounded traveler was no kin of theirs. But the Samaritan surmounted a wide and hazardous cultural breach and recognized that the man in the ditch was his neighbor. Kindness always rises from that kind of awareness.

On the other hand, unkindness is always connected in some way with the refusal to acknowledge kinship. John Woolman, the Colonial Quaker, was among the first to point to the vicious circle that slavery kept going in American society. The only way that reasonably decent people could treat other people like that, he observed, was to convince themselves that the other people were not human beings. But just because the slaves were kept like animals it was easy for decent people to convince themselves that the blacks were in fact subhuman.

John R. Coleman is an unusual man whom I had the privilege of meeting briefly last spring. A labor economist by trade, he is president of Haverford

College and chairman of the board of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia. Early in 1973 he spent a three-month leave of absence from the college in a manner he kept secret from everyone except one of his sons. Part of the time Dr. Coleman worked as a laborer laying sewage pipe in Atlanta. Later he was employed as a sandwich and salad man in a Boston restaurant. The last part of his sabbatical he spent collecting garbage in a suburb of Washington, D.C. His book, Blue-Collar Journal, tells the story. Surprisingly, Dr. Coleman came to enjoy all three jobs and to find some advantages in them over being a college president. But he also learned something about how people at the bottom of the occupational scale are relegated to a sort of subhuman category by other people. He learned what it meant to be:

"just an /expletive deleted/ common laborer."

The garbage collecting job was most revealing in this way. When President Coleman went into people's back yards to perform a public service he greeted people in a friendly way. In return he usually received a blank stare. People did their best to make believe that garbagemen, like robbery victims on the road to Jericho, did not exist.

Dr. Coleman's partner in garbage collecting was a young family man named Steve. One day Steve let go about how other people treated him:

> "The way most people look at you you'd think a trashman was a /expletive deleted/ monster. Say 'hello' and they stare at you in surprise. They don't know we're human. They think that we can carry any load at all, and that we should carry whatever they put out.
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> This one lady put cinder blocks in her /expletive deleted/ can. I said we couldn't take them. She said, 'Who are you to say what goes? You're nothing but a trashman.' I told her, 'Listen, lady, I got an I.Q. of 137, and I graduated near the top of my high school class. I do this for the money, not because it's all I can do.'
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> Later that one became friendly and even gave me beer in the summer. I made her think."

Sometimes it isn't until we are shocked into admitting somebody to the human race that we are able to perform an act of kindness.

Of course, kindness need not be limited to the human race. John Woolman, who noted that people treated black people like animals, was concerned about the way people treated animals too. He refused to ride the stage coaches in England because he felt the horses were abused.

Even with animals, I think, the connection between kindness and kinship applies. It is only when we have "feelings befitting our common nature" that we realize that a cat suffers from the cold and that a dog likes to know that he is appreciated.

Perhaps then there is some value in sharing experiences with our fellow creatures. They go to such lengths to live in our world; it is only fair that we make some effort to live in theirs. Have you ever pondered what it much do to a dog's self-image to spend most of his time in a human world? Just yesterday I heard someone tell the story of a child supposedly raised among wolves. The child did not seem human. Well, by the same token, how can a cat raised among people, be feling, or a dog, canine?

At times I try to enter my dog's world. The other members of my family find this rather odd, so two years ago I wrote a little piece to explain my behavior. It is entitled, "Halfway."

If I roll on the floor
Or walk upstairs on all fours,
I am only meeting him halfway
Who sleeps on my sofa
And thinks the best he can
Like a man.
And if I bark at passing cats
Or howl in the night,
It is only fair return
For his own empathy.
I would not ask him to shake hands
Were I not willing to touch noses.

I suppose it is Francis of Assisi whose somewhat legendary image best expresses in Christian terms this linkage of which I speak, the linkage between kinship and kindness. It was Francis, the rich merchant's son who gave his robe to the beggar; the fastidious gentleman who kissed the leper. It was Francis, too, who preached to the birds. G. K. Chesterton wrote something about Francis that fits right in with this whole point about kindness and kinship. Said Chesterton:

> "To him the world was small, not because he had any view as to its size, but for the reason that gossiping ladies find it small, because so many relatives were to be found in it. If you had taken him to the loneliest star that the madness of an astronomer can conceive, he would only have beheld in it the features of a new friend."

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Another important point about kindness is this: Kindness always has to do with particulars. It is not deeds of noble sacrifice or sweeping philanthropy that we associate with kindness. Kindness has to do with what Wordsworth called:

> "That best portion of a good man's life, -
> His little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love."

Little they are, and nameless, But sometimes we do remember. President Coleman came to this insight toward the end of his Blue Collar Journal.

> "There was a time when I thought that, if I had an impact on Haverford at all, it would be through the big moves I made. A still better teaching faculty, coeducation, diversity in the student body, off-campus involvement, a balanced budget - these would be my key tests. Now I'm no longer sure. My real stamp may be through much smaller acts. What will last for those who knew me in these years may just be an individual contact, a moment of thrust and concern. Ask me now at what single moment I was best at my job, and I think of a time when I learned a particular student was in trouble and alone, caught up in a conflict situation with his parents that tore at his whole life up to that point. I went to his room in the dorms. He was man enough to cry. I didn't

give him one ounce of advice that could help at the time, but I was there and he knew I cared. I don't know where he is today. Yet he knows he's the one I'm talking about - and he knows that it helped him to have me there.

Or ask at what single moment a student did the most to help me in turn, and I think of a time when I came home dejected from a series of meetings that seemed wordy and mean. I sat in the library of my house, wondering why I stayed at this work. A student came in. He had had no contact with those meetings and had no reason so far as I know to be aware that I was thinking of chucking it all. He said only one thing and left: 'I think you're doing a great job.' I know where he is today. He know's he's the one I'm talking about - and he knows it helped me to have him there."

Sometimes the little, nameless acts of kindness do not go unremembered. But always this is true: they speak to the needs of particular creatures in particular situations.

There are great earth-shaking events that light up for us the love of God and man. There were such events in the life of Jesus. We remember them. But I suspect that many years ago there was an old woman who never knew about the crucifixion. Yet she remembered that when she was a little girl and some heavy-handed fishermen were pushing her away, a voice said, "Let the little children come to me."

I can imagine that many years ago there was a tax-collector who never knew for sure what happened among the disciples on Easter day. He was a social outcast and never belonged to any inner circle. Yet he remembered that one day a prophet came through town and made a point of staying in the tax-collector's house.

I can believe that there was a foreign woman who never heard the great sermon delivered from a hillside along Lake Galilee. Yet she recalled that one day by the Mediterranean shore, a man of powerful fatih laid healing hands upon her little girl.

The fruit of the Spirit is kindness. It grows out of the sense of kinship. It lives among the particulars, the small moves of love amid the little details of need.