



Acts of Kindness

Kindness Is Not Weakness

Whatever your personal political preference or affiliation, I am sure you would have noticed – or be saddened by the need for – this particular reference to kindness by Anthony Albanese in a recent debate preceding the election. It struck me. It brought to my mind another statement of Christ's teaching – 'and the meek shall inherit the earth.' In the latter, 'meekness' has been construed as 'weakness' in the way 'kindness' is alluded to in Albanese's statement.

Please allow me to take a moment to reflect upon what these sentiments mean to me. Albanese's reference of course occurred in the context of a political joust but also against the backdrop of a world stage in which self-interest is lauded by many above kindness. We are now seeing how that view plays out globally. Nationally and indeed perhaps personally, we have experienced the harshness of this world view and even begun to despair about the inhospitable society we have become in which a leader has thought it necessary to make this statement.

Christ's axiom to me equates with the contemporary concept of 'our vulnerability being our strength'. The paradox both statements encompass is that a perceived weakness, with compassionate reframing, is actually a resilient strength. Indeed, the 'meek' and the 'vulnerable' can bring gentleness and grace into a conversation, with the potential to defuse aggressive energy, and thereby enable space for the nuanced discussions and negotiations which grow rather than diminish us and our world.

When I was teaching at Geelong Grammar School and Justin was Director of the Positive Education Institute, one of the guest speakers who spoke to us introduced the precept of Being of Benefit (BoB). The guest was Dr Tony Fernando, and he explained this approach in a way that epitomises kindness to me. He elaborated, 'When encountering or initiating a conversation or consultation with someone, ask the question, How may I be of benefit?' I was taken with the kindness of this question, the way it honours the person and leaves the agency with them about how they might choose to be helped. I saw it as a genuine and appropriate request for guidance rather than an assumption that the 'asker' knew best. Following the presentation, I advocated with my husband, Gary, for us to adopt this question to use with our loved ones. I considered it would ensure that we were responsive and kind and appropriate in our proposed 'helping' of them.

Over the last few years, it has become our guiding mantra, the question we ask each weekend. It is our practice to consider our grown children (of whom we have four) and their lives, and decide to whom we will direct the question. We do this to be fair in our contribution to them all in the distribution of our help. To be clear also, our help is 'feet on the ground,' rather than 'handouts.' Quite apart from not having the resources for handouts, we want to be involved meaningfully in their lives.



Perhaps our explicit and intentional practice of 'acts of kindness,' of 'being of benefit' is unnecessarily formal. Maybe it is really just how a family, a community, and a world should function inherently.

However, 'should' does not reflect our reality. It is therefore our way of taking action. I declare, in the spirit of Albanese, Christ and Fernando, that I stand for kindness, gentleness and dignity as hallmarks of a decent society.