



# Lenten

## Reflection Series

One Church, Many Voices

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## Fourth Sunday of Lent - March 14

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*“Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance,  
but the Lord looks into the heart”*

*- 1 Sm 7*

As I was preparing to write this reflection, I turned to the scriptures for the Fourth Sunday of Lent and was particularly struck by the passage above from the first reading.

In today's image-obsessed world we often judge, stereotype and dismiss others because of their outward appearance, sex, color of their skin, status, beliefs and affiliations. In a world seen through the myopic lens of filtered selfies, the endless pursuit of “likes” and social posts we can become blind to seeing deeper and looking inward to what really matters and defines a person. It's human nature. While I am certainly not proud of my shortsighted actions, I know I am guilty of this.

I believe it's my and my husband's ongoing role to educate, encourage and expect each other and our children to work to shift the focus from judgement to acceptance, from exclusion to inclusion. To make a conscious effort to approach others with a kind and gentle heart. In our house that translates to our “Lead with Kindness” philosophy. It's a saying that's been on repeat since our children were young and one that at times is rightfully repeated back to me by our now teens when I am not being my kindest, best self (touché!).

Earlier this week, in fact, our children called me out for a joke – a ribbing really – I made during dinner. Humor is one of the love languages spoken in our home. But even so, as soon as the words tumbled from my lips, as if on cue, they said in unison: “that wasn't very nice, Mom. Lead with kindness.” They were right! It was meant to be lighthearted, but it was humor that wasn't kindhearted.

Lead with Kindness. It's a simple phrase – a take on the saying “What Would Jesus Do” some might say – used to try to instill the value that we should try to enter and lean into each and every encounter and interaction with others with the lens of kindness and acceptance. A guide and mantra to inspire greeting others with a warm smile, friendly hello and understanding ear; to encourage reaching out to those excluded or on the periphery; to spur the use of kind words and thoughtful gestures; to aim to make a human connection with all of those on our daily path so they feel seen, respected and valued; to simply be courteous, considerate and kind to everyone. A prescription, if you will, for seeing, acknowledging and accepting others for who they are and meeting them where they are.

There is a transforming power of kind actions and kind words that drives meaningful and nourishing human connection. Kindness is contagious (the good kind!). Can you tell I am a firm believer in the power of kindness?

Using appearance as the distorted lens by which we evaluate others causes us to make uniformed judgments and problematic assumptions which can be divisive, hurtful and stagnating. That clouded lens can numb us, hinder us from making meaningful connections with those we encounter and cause us to miss out on gaining a rich and deeper understanding of others' experiences and perspectives which can enhance our lives.

The scriptures this week teach us that we are blind in our judgements/assessments and need God's help to open our eyes, minds and hearts. We are only human after all, so seeing past physical attributes and unimportant material things to the inward, defining characteristics that make each of us Christ-like is a daily practice. It's cultivating a habit of open, clear, and penetrating eyes trained to see and appreciate the beauty of others that lies within (and cultivating open ears so we aren't tone deaf). It's working tirelessly to eliminate prejudice and discrimination in our attitudes towards others. Unfortunately, experience has taught me that because of human nature this isn't always easy (translation: at times, I fall victim to making snap, unfair, uninformed judgments and assumptions). I've learned I need God's grace as I continue to work to become the person God is calling me to be.

Lent can be a time to refocus and adjust our vision to God's way of seeing. Seeing others with His loving and accepting eyes. Choosing to recognize and celebrate the goodness, beauty and uniqueness in each of us – all made in God's image. A time for choosing kindness.

My prayer for Lent is that God guides me to put our family “Lead with Kindness” motto into action each and every day and I ask God – and those I may hurt by my actions – for forgiveness when I fail to do so.

My hope is that each of us can harness our inner superhero power of seeing through appearances, peering into others' hearts to recognize and acknowledge the wonderful gift each of us is in this world.

## Personal Reflection Questions

Lent is a time of self-examination and renewal. Consider using the reflection prompts below to help further your contemplation and open your mind and heart during the 40-day journey of Lent.

- **In what ways can you lead with kindness? How can you move from blindness to kindness?**
- **What causes my spiritual blindness? Where do I experience this?**
- **How can we adjust our vision to God's way of seeing?**
- **How have you fallen victim to judging by appearances?**