

At-Home Sunday School For Sunday, January 14, 2024

In Defense of Kindness, by Bruce Reyes-Chow: Week 20

We have come to the halfway point for this series of lessons. In defense of Kindness by Bruce Reyes-Chin is the book these lessons are coming from. The chapters have been condensed into lessons for you to reflect on and to address how we choose to be kind in our everyday lives. You can use these lessons or purchase the book for the full text. Please feel free to discuss the topics with friends or to journal your own thoughts as you continue your own journey on your faith path.

Kindness Week 20

Kindness And Institutional Change – Part A

Bruce loves well-run meetings. He has moderated or facilitated meetings of just a few persons to ones of over a thousand and can tell us this: a well-run meeting can dramatically change the ways we experience one another and thus how much we will be committed to the community's purpose and life together. So how does kindness fit into running a meeting, you ask?

In many churches, being at Session in Bruce's church, or on the church council or board isn't generally the most life-giving and fun experience. Bruce's group met in their church "living room," and they each brought their own food and beverage choice. They understood that the purpose of the meeting was to be one of mutual support and connection, a sacred task of leading other people in their spiritual journeys. Yes, decisions were made about budgets and maintenance and other things. The true task was to be an extension of an experience that they were creating as a church, and an experience that was life-giving and meaningful.

At one of the meetings, one person came up the stairs, arriving right after getting off work, and plopped down on one of the bright orange couches in the living room with a burrito and beer in hand. She exhaled deeply, then said, "I'm so glad to be at Session." That moment affirmed to Bruce that the culture in the group was becoming one of meaning. It affirmed that if we honor and value the complex ways in which people engage in organizational work, we are honoring the person and showing them kindness. At the end of the day, kindness in a meeting environment is about valuing the human before us: their time, their perspectives, and their personalities.

Whether you are dealing with something as important as a personnel decision or something as mind-numbing as who should have access to the photocopier codes, how these decisions are handled can help build up or tear down the community. Decisions are rarely neutral in impact. Clearly someone in the room felt it was an important conversation to have. For instance, if Bruce had called the meeting "mind-numbing" at the time, that would not have been helpful or kind.

Bruce figured that a chapter on meetings screams for a kindness agenda, we will share that next week.