

## Friday Grind 6/12/2026 - KINDNESS

**Pic: First UCC, Richmond 1888-2026**



When cruelty becomes normal, kindness looks radical. Today, I can choose to Be kind.

I can choose to Be generous. I can choose to Be inclusive. I can choose to not demean or shame.

STORY: I love this story about a woman traveling alone—by train—who arrived in a new city. There was time until her next train connection, so she struck up a conversation with another traveler, a woman also making a stopover, in the midst of a very long journey. The traveler was tired, and the woman unthinkingly handed her a sandwich that she'd been saving for later.

It began as a conversation, and become a friendship that lasted for twenty years. After the woman died, her son happened upon a packet of his mother's correspondence. One thing particularly struck him. "There were so many letters from this woman she had met in the train station. And they all ended with the same words: 'I'll never forget that you fed me.'"

And in a world that weighs and measures, we think, "But those are such small gestures." Or, "After all, it's 'just a' sandwich." Ahhh yes. But, as Jon Kabat-Zinn reminds us, "The little things? The little moments? They aren't little." They are difference makers. They are the building blocks for healing. They are the building blocks for "re-humanizing". They are the building blocks for restoring dignity. I love the phrase, "choosing to heal". It would be a great book title. And an even better life mission. "What do you do?" "I choose to create moments that heal." As Ashley Judd noted when talking about her mother, "You can pretend to care. But you can't pretend to show up."

Here's the deal: I believe in stories of love and kindness, that nourish and replenish and enrich our weary soul. And more than ever, we need

gifts of kindness in a world that honors cruelty as the new normal. We live in a world that can be merciless—with violence and hatred perpetrated by people in power. And yes, there are a heap plenty of people and systems to blame. (And it is always some other people, and some other system.). But the truth is that we wound one another.

We wound with real wars, and real bullets. We wound with words, and with hatred and resentment. We wound with intolerance and small-mindedness (some of it in the name of "love" and God). "If we have no peace," Mother Teresa reminded us, "it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."

Well, if we do belong to one other, then "they"—the "least of these" and those without voices—are indeed, our children.

Ours to care for.

Ours to listen to.

Ours to see.

Yes. Think of kindness, as resistance.

I can hear my hero's—Mr. Rogers—voice.

"Imagine if we all walked into the world with the belief that each person was inherently worthy.

Imagine if our goal was to help each other recognize that we are worthy of being loved.

Imagine if we sought to listen more than we spoke. I imagine if this was the case, that our conversation would change, our understanding of those around us would shift, and our national conversations would be more civil."

From Jewish tradition we learn our job title; Tikkun olam. Literally, "repairing the world". The word olam also means hidden. We need to repair the world so that its Creator is no longer hidden within, but shines through each thing in magnificent, harmonious beauty.

As a gardener this makes perfect sense. It's all about the soil. Nutritious or nutritive soil creates and generates life. Toxic soil does not. Fertility is stifled, because the nutrients have been leached.

Tikkun, to repair the soil of the world with nutrients: kindness, a balm of generosity, a capacity to accommodate fragility, and a softness of spirit. What Eve Ensler called, "The daily subtle simple gathering of kindness."

Choosing (working) to heal (Tikkun olam) isn't only for the spiritually or intellectually inclined. Choosing to heal is in our DNA. As children of our creator, we are healers.

In kindness, we affirm dignity.

In empathy, we see value and build connections. With compassion and justice, we right wrongs and create sanctuaries.

I think we lose sight of the fact that kindness is a form of strength, not weakness.

It takes courage to remain gentle in a world that often celebrates harshness.

It requires bravery to keep our hearts open when it might feel safer to close them. Each act of kindness is a quiet rebellion against cynicism and indifference, a statement of faith in our shared humanity.

"A genuinely kind person is always on the lookout for how to contribute to the lives of others," Tyler VanderWeele writes. "In every conversation, you're wondering what you can do or say to be encouraging or helpful."

(This made me smile big: Every year, Tyler VanderWeele chooses a six-week span to do things for others that might ordinarily seem too inconvenient. His good deeds are many and varied: he might give a friend an unexpected gift, invite someone out for coffee, set aside time at work to support a colleague, or bring a family member's favorite food to the dinner table.)

"If we have no peace," Mother Teresa reminded us, "it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." Yes... So, here's our paradigm shift: Who you are, makes a difference. Let us make our decisions—as individuals, as organizations—with kindness and empathy as our core values. And let us take this to heart: Those who cannot feel the pain of others should never be trusted with their fate. Power without compassion walks a crooked trail, and leaves too many wounded.

Summer is upon us. Savor your moments. And we're loving our garden. And yes, sadly, the deer are loving our garden too. I'm not sure if my thoughts on kindness fit in the way I will be talking to the deer while they are de-flowering. And thank you all for your acts of kindness in

your communities. And let us not forget the healing and tender necessity of self-kindness. It matters. Be gentle with yourself.

Quote for our weekend...

"Morality is all we have left to find us into shared responsibility for the common good. Morality is our oldest and most powerful resource for turning disconnected 'I's' into a collective 'we.' It's the alchemy that turns selfish genes into selfless people, egoists into altruists, and self-interested striving into empathy, sympathy, and compassion for others."

-Jonathan Sacks