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Hello and welcome to this episode of the Saint Andrew's Enfield podcast with me, Steve Griffiths. And in this episode we're going to be thinking about, um, one of the most basic attitudes or values, which we should hold, not just as Christians, but as human beings. And the attitude I'm talking about is kindness, showing kindness towards others and trying to make the world a kinder place. And to think about this topic we're going to reflect together on one of the Psalms. We're going to think about Psalm 141, which is such a lovely Psalm to think about. So kindness and how to put that at the forefront of our behaviour towards others. And I just want to say from the outset that generally speaking, I think that the world we live in is a beautiful place, um, filled with beautiful people who do beautiful things. Good far outweighs bad in our world, and we need to hold onto that.

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But we know that the impact of negativity, the consequences of negativity, far outweigh the size of its presence. Uh, this week I hurt my foot. I won't bore you with the story of how, but I have a problem with, uh, a small part of my right foot. And the impact of that on my body, uh, far outweighs the physical size of the injury. Uh, I'm walking with a bit of a limp at the moment and that's now hurting my hip and I'm not able to sleep too well at night, which is making me even more grumpy than I usually am. And that's having a knock on effect with some of my relationships. So a small injury, a small piece of negativity in my body is having far reaching consequences. And so it is in the world in which we live - a beautiful world full of beautiful people doing beautiful things - but where there is negativity or evil, um, that can have a huge impact that far outweighs the size of its presence.

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And we see that in so many ways in our country at the moment. I'm based in the UK, so I'm talking about that. Um, there's, there's a political debate going on about Brexit as I am recording this. You probably know about that already. Um, but the debate is one in which now people are calling those who hold other views, the most terrible names, "Traitor", "Betrayer", "Delusional", "Selfish". Um, when did it become okay to talk to other people like that just because they hold a different political opinion? Uh, when did it become okay to throw milkshakes and eggs over politicians? Um, and in our UK context at the moment, when did it become okay to threaten MPs with rape and murder over social media just because they're following their consciences on a particular issue? How have we got to this? How has our society, um, got to the place where that kind of thing has become normalized?

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And we see the huge impact of little evils, uh, in our social media too. The most nasty, unkind things being written in Facebook posts. Uh, people being humiliated and slandered and cyber-bullied even to the point where some people are taking their own lives. How have we got here? Have we got to this place? When did it become the social norm for such unkindnesses to be just the way we do things? It seems to me that if the world needs anything right now, uh, more than anything, it needs kindness. And if the church has anything to

offer the world, it must surely be a movement, a community of kindness where we say kind things and we act kindly to one another and we do kind things in the wider community. The world is crying out for kindness. And I guess that's always been the case.

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But it does seem amplified in this sort of 24 hour news culture, this social media culture in which we can be absolved of ethical responsibilities because we're firing shots from the safety of a keyboard and a screen. Uh, we know that it's always been the case that the world needs kindness. Um, and in the Psalm that we're thinking about today, uh, Psalm 141, it was the experience of David who wrote this Psalm that he was on the receiving end of deep unkindness from others. And uh, he wrote this Psalm trying to work out how to deal with that. David recognized the unkindness in the nation. And he knew that as a follower of God, he had to find a way to live in that society without succumbing to the unkind words and behaviours that he saw all around him. And for us as Christians, um, I think we're in the same position.

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How do we live and act in a world that at times is deeply unkind without falling into the trap of being like that ourselves? How do we as Christians, uh, stick to our convictions about how to live for God in an age where there's so much pressure on us to engage with the tensions and the conflicts and the unkindnesses of the world? Because unkindness has become normalized. It's part of the social fabric now and it's deemed to be acceptable in the realms of politics and social interaction. And bizarrely, to seek the way of kindness is seen by many as an odd thing to do. But as Christians, kindness has to be the norm. It has to underpin all that we say and all that we do as individuals and as a church. So how do we live kindly? How do we prepare ourselves to be kind people? Well, that's what Psalm 141 fundamentally is all about. And in this podcast there's four things that I want to draw out from that Psalm in this regard.

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And the first thing

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to say from this Psalm is that kindness springs from being in a right relationship with God. In verses one and two of the Psalm, David writes this, he says, "I call upon you, oh Lord, come quickly to me. Give ear to my voice when I call to you. Let my prayer be counted as incense before you and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice." David was aware of the problems in the nation. He was determined not to become a party to all that unkindness and he knew that the foundation for keeping himself separate from that was to be in a right and prayerful relationship with God. David knew, as we all know, that we don't really have the strength within ourselves to avoid the temptation of going along with the crowd. Uh, he needed God's strength to help him. It happens with me,

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I'm sure it happens with all of us that, you know, we might be sitting with a group of friends enjoying a glass of wine or something, and then the conversation just turns to become a little bit unkind. Uh, we might start criticizing someone, maybe as a joke. Or a bit of gossip might start going around. And we know that the right thing to do is to say, "Look, guys, this really isn't

appropriate, is it? Can we change the conversation?" Uh, but it's hard to do that. It's hard to go against the flow and to stand up for what is right. And David knew that when he wrote this Psalm. And so he asks God to change his heart so that he becomes more prayerful and more aware of living in God's presence so that he then becomes more inclined to do the right thing when it's needed.

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"I call upon you, oh Lord, come quickly to me. Give ear to my voice when I call you. Let my prayer be counted as incense before you and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice." So if we want to have a kind and gentle relationship with the world, we need first to have a worshipful relationship with God, to have God at the center of all our thoughts and actions, so that then radiates outwards in how we interact with other people. A relationship with Jesus Christ is how we experience true love shown towards us. And that experience of love then transforms how we respond to others. If God has loved us so much to share his Son with us, then we become more convinced that we need to share love with others, uh, to love our enemies, not in our own strength, but in the strength that God gives, to um, forgive those who've hurt us, not in our own strength, but in the strength that God gives. To bring healing where there's hurt. We can't do that in our own strength, but we can do that in the strength that God gives. So the strength of God at work in us, as we learn to rely more and more on him, um, transforms how we interact with the world and increases a spirit of kindness within us.

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So moving on to our second point from this Psalm, um, that desire to serve God and to show kindness, um, impacts what we say and how we behave. In verses three and four, David writes this, he says, "Set a guard over my mouth, oh Lord. Keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not turn my heart to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with those who work iniquity. Do not let me eat of their delicacies." "Set a guard over my mouth. Do not turn my heart to any evil." Uh, if we want to show kindness in a world that can be a very unkind place, we need to ask God to guard our mouths and guard our hearts. And it's interesting, isn't it, that David prioritizes our speech here? Now, the Bible has got a lot to say about speech because we know that words can utterly destroy people.

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Words can utterly destroy communities. Gossip, slander, lies, criticism, spreading rumors. These are absolutely not the types of behavior that are acceptable before God. They're absolutely not acceptable in the church. Uh, we mustn't gossip about one another. We mustn't talk about one another behind our backs. We mustn't criticize people or judge them. It's completely unacceptable to do that because it destroys lives. It destroys families. Um, it can destroy the community. "So set a guard over my mouth. Do not turn my heart to any evil." The Gospel of Jesus Christ that we are called to live and proclaim is a Gospel of soothing words, loving words, kind words, encouraging words. And it is a denial of the Gospel to act any other way. Um, we called to build one another up. We're not called to tear one another down. That isn't the way of Christ. Uh, we should speak only words that heal and encourage. We should

build a protective and safe environment with our words. Not a place where people feel judged or vulnerable. We need to learn to use words wisely.

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And that brings

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us on to the third point from this Psalm, which is to say that correction is different from judgment. And that in our words, we may be called to correct someone, but from a position of love and kindness and encouragement. In verse five, David writes this in Psalm 141, he says, "Let the righteous strike me. Let the faithful correct me." Now this is hard for us all to hear because we don't like to be corrected, do we?. But the ability to receive correction, which is very different from judgment is really important. Uh, I've worked out in India, um, many times, uh, throughout my, uh, Christian ministry and the first time I worked in India was in 1992. I was there for nearly four months working in some of the most trying conditions I suppose of poverty and disease that I've ever encountered. And it was a massive culture shock for me working in the slums of Delhi.

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And I was traumatized and I was angry about what I was seeing and, uh, I didn't actually handle it at all well, um, and one day after I'd been there a couple of months a Christian who we were working with, uh, took me to one side and he said, "You know, Steve, since you've arrived, uh, I haven't heard you say a single positive thing about anything. You need to change the way you see things and changed the way you're talking." And I was so angry that he dared to have a go at me like that. Uh, but you know, he was right to do it. He wasn't criticizing me, he wasn't judging me. He was just gently trying to correct my behavior and build me up as a Christian and build me up as a human being. And it was hard for me to hear, but he was right to do it.

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And it took courage on his part. And you know, we cannot grow as Christians unless we are willing to be corrected. It's tough. None of us like to go through that experience, but it is necessary for our growth in faith. And in the Letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament, it says this, "Let us spur one another on towards love and good deeds". And part of that spurring on is to correct one another in love. We're all broken people. We all need correcting. But it takes wisdom and courage to engage in that process. It seems to me that as a church and as a nation, we seem to have lost the art of kind correction and we seem to have replaced it with judgmentalism. A correction done properly is a kindness. It helps to edify and build character. Now, when we seek to correct someone, we need wisdom and discernment.

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Correction has to come from prayer and a sense that this is God's word to someone. Um, otherwise it is just about us getting something off our chest. Uh, if somebody came up to me after one of my church services and said, uh, "Steve, your sermons are a bit long, aren't they?" Uh, then it's more likely that they're offering a personal opinion than an edifying correction. But if that person went away and prayed about it for some time and then came back and said, "Steve, thank you for your preaching ministry and the hard work you put

into all your sermons. How can we best support you to improve your sermons so they become more useful to the community?" Uh, then that begins to look a little bit more like a kind and an edifying correction. So correction then is not judgment. Correction seeks to build up and edify. It doesn't seek to destroy or humiliate

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or embarrass. So

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kindness comes out of a right and prayerful relationship with God. Kindness is worked out through how we speak and act. Uh, kindness is built up through prayerful correction. Um, and finally, uh, from this Psalm 141, we notice that kindness has a long term impact. In verses five and six, David writes this, he says, "My prayer is continually against wicked deeds. When they are given over to those who shall condemn them, then they shall learn that my words were pleasant." Wickedness shall not prevail in our world. Uh, evil shall not prevail. It won't triumph in our world. At some point, all that is wicked and all that is evil will come under God's judgment. And as David writes here, "then they shall learn that my words were pleasant". There's a long term goal, there's a long term impact to acting kindly. Uh, it's not just about a one off activity in a given situation, but it's about creating a culture of kindness, uh, that shapes the world

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Um, and stands against, uh, wickedness and evil. So as Christians, we need to set ourselves apart from the unkindnesses of this world. We need to speak only words of kindness, um, undertake only acts of kindness. And one day that will be vindicated and the power of kindness will triumph over everything else. "Then they shall learn that my words were pleasant", says King David. Kindness and love shall prevail. And we want to be part of a movement of kindness, a movement of love, a movement that will have a transformative impact on the community in which we live

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and on the wider world.

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So the lesson then really from Psalm 141 is quite simple. Be kind. Love one another. Say only kind words. Do only kind things. And in that way we will be honoring God in how we live our lives and we will be reflecting God to a world that is in such deep need for him. This is a beautiful world with such beautiful people doing beautiful things. Um, so let's make sure that we align ourselves with beauty and goodness and kindness. Let's stand against the negativity that so often marring the beauty, uh, through its unkind speech and actions. Let's build one another up with kindness and love. And may our churches be known above all else as counter cultural communities of kindness, where everyone is accepted, everyone is loved for who they are, and everyone goes away feeling better about themselves, more loved, more lovable than when they first came in.

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So I hope you've found this a useful podcast. If you've got anything that you want to add into the conversation, then please do email me, steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org. Check out our website -

standrewsenfield.com. Our Facebook page is St Andrew's Enfield. And please do subscribe to these podcasts. Let other people know about them too. And wherever you are, whatever you're doing today, I hope that you get a deep sense of God's kindness shown towards you in Jesus, and that you get some good opportunities to show kindness towards others. So have a great day, uh, build a kinder world for us all today through your words and through your actions.

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Bye.