



The Abbey

KINDNESS

The kindness of disasters –
how humanity unites

Aurelia, Upper IV (Year 9)



The kindness of disasters – how humanity unites

*“Be kind, for everyone you meet is
fighting a harder battle”.*

Plato

We live in a world where disasters are now sadly a common event and not something we only read about in history books. Disasters take many forms, from worldwide pandemics such as Covid-19 to the aftermath of hurricanes, tsunamis and landslides that devastate life and the surrounding communities; terrorist attacks such as 9/11 and wars such as Afghanistan and the current war between Ukraine and Russia. Disasters can also be revealed over time: the recent World Cup highlighted the lack of basic human rights and liberties within many parts of our world through the loss of lives from poor working conditions in building the stadiums. However, if you look beyond the immediate aftermath of a disaster, there will always be stories of kindness and how the touch of human kindness provides strength and the ability for the human race to survive.





Kindness is the ‘genuine willingness to use one’s time, talent and resources to better the lives of others and the world through genuine acts of love, compassion, generosity and service.’

Natural disasters such as the aftermath of hurricanes, tsunamis and landslides, often see communities left without power or running water, with emergency services overwhelmed and transport systems paralysed for long periods and with many suffering from both emotional and physical challenges. The kindness of strangers in such situations has the effect of softening the blow and providing hope.

There are many examples of disasters provoking extreme selfishness and brutal survival-of-the-fittest attitudes such as looting and rioting, but when you take a closer look, many who suffer and cope with crises are altruistic in outlook and the bigger picture is often one of cooperation and support. People donate to fundraising, give up their time, belongings and talents to support others. They donate their skills in repairing homes and helping the injured, rescuing people and animals and providing shelter and meals. During the Covid-19 pandemic many checked in on their elderly and sick neighbours and did weekly shopping for those in need. Many of those who hoarded supplies of toilet rolls and broccoli often found themselves sharing their supplies.

Elderly Londoners can still be heard recalling fondly the unity and empathy experienced during the Blitz, which emerged from the suffering and loss of loved ones, homes and lives. The stories told often have huge emphasis placed on the kindness and generosity survivors felt and on the small acts of kindness which have thereafter been remembered and treasured for lifetimes.

In the aftermath of 9/11 there were many reports of an immediate sense of solidarity in New York and within the US as a whole. The musical *Come From Away* tells a story of the Newfoundland Community who provided kindness and shelter to 7,000 air passengers who were grounded as a result of the 9/11 attacks. Passengers were invited

into the lives of the Community and their fears and heartache along with cultural differences were overcome and gave way to lasting bonds and friendships.

Alongside the reporting on the news of many of the disasters which occur, are multiple stories of kindness, cooperation and friendship. Races come together to pray, embrace and provide vital human contact to those in need. Human contact restores faith in life and provides a reason for people to go on.

Selfless work for others brings a sense of purpose for many and an infectious positivity which spreads a sense of wellbeing and hope and belief in kindness. People forget their own anxieties and fears and become kinder to themselves too, setting aside selfish concerns. People move to behave as their better selves in the face of disaster and they find a meaningful role for themselves in social connection and are able to see more clearly where that is missing from their everyday lives. This is followed by people making very real positive changes to their own lives which ultimately better the world as a whole.

Humans need human emotional support to survive and disasters recentre our thoughts on what is truly important and essential for us to live in our current world. The bottom line is that we need each other. The more we relate to others, the stronger our bond and the greater our ability to survive.

When we face the toughest challenges our true natures are revealed. We are brought together and reach out to each other in kindness and empathy. We are unified in the face of disaster and catastrophe.

Kindness is and hopefully always will be one of the most beautiful and powerful forces for good. It is love in action and it is deeply sad that often it takes a disaster for us to remember the basic necessity of kindness for our survival. Kindness breathes life and goodness back into our souls and gives us strength. It reminds us of why we are on Earth and how we can use our lives to help others.

Disaster changes the world but the damage is not irreparable. The kindness generated by disasters restores balance and meaning and lays the foundation for a brighter and more beautiful future for us all.

Charles Darwin believed that “the human being’s capacity for kindness is instrumental to his evolutionary success”. Kindness is our defence against ourselves and our world.

Tolstoy wrote that “nothing can make our lives or the lives of other people more beautiful than perpetual kindness”. If enough people are kind then it makes us proud and when even more people want to be kind then it makes us hopeful. Kindness is in our genetic makeup and whilst it is often masked by jealousy and selfishness it is never far from the surface. We all need to remember that we have a natural impulse of kindness.

My favourite book is *Wonder* by RJ Palacio, the story which many of you will know of an ordinary boy with an extraordinary face. Whilst I in no way mention Auggie so as to imply that his situation is a disaster, where the disaster lies is in human behaviour and the way Auggie is treated by some in that story. However, what is surprising is that it is not the devastating scenes of characters within the book being mean to Auggie which causes me to feel great emotion: it is the moments of kindness at unexpected times and in often unexpected ways which make me cry.

It shouldn’t need disasters to manifest kindness and nor should it take the failings of human nature for us to remember the power of kindness and unity in the face of disaster. It is always in our power to provide the counter balance of unity and kindness when others are in need.

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