

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
June 17, 2018  
Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer  
**Live at peace**

—Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 12:17-18

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* It's one big delicious fruit pie with nine delicious slices. A fruit pie just in time for summer—this is the fruit of the Spirit. And the slice of the day is peace.

Every slice of the fruit of the Spirit has sin of the flesh that opposes it. Before the apostle Paul listed the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter five, he gave a much different list. "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." From that list of sins, you could pick out four that directly counter today's slice of the pie, which is peace. Hatred, discord, dissensions, factions—they all war against peace.

I saw a bumper sticker on someone's car, and it went like this: "Losing faith in humanity one person at a time." You get your daily dose of local news on TV, over the radio, on the internet, and it's generally one story after another of people upsetting the peace in their city, in their community, in their home. Of course, such hatred and discord are likely to make the news. You rarely hear a daily poll saying that 74 percent of households report that they are getting along remarkably well since waking up this morning. So maybe your faith in humanity is still somewhat intact. But then you go to the grocery store, and a beggar approaches you, looking for cash. When you don't have any cash to give or don't think it's wise to give any cash, the beggar gets mad at you and says mean things about you. You stop by the library, and before you get in, you have to run the gauntlet of people with clipboards asking you to sign a petition for some divisive political cause that you may not even agree with. You go to work, and it's very possible there is somebody there you are trying to avoid that day, not wanting much to do with them beyond giving them a fake "Oh, hi, how are you?" If your kid is in school, it would be hard to get through the year without your kid having conflict with some other kid in the room. Your child has a conflict with the teacher. The teacher has a conflict with your child, and in such a case, it might seem like a conflict with you, too. Then there's the family. I saw a group hiking a trail, and they all had on the same colored t-shirt that said, "Help me, I'm on a family vacation." But it's not so funny when what should be your haven from outside conflict can turn itself into your greatest source of frustration and pain. Your spouse gets short with you, and you in turn get short with your spouse. You get upset with the other parent because you think the other is too overbearing with the kids, or too lenient with the kids. You resent the difficulties a son or daughter has brought into your life because of their behavior. Or you feel bitter toward your parents for the wrongs they have done. Finally, there's church, the place where you gather with brothers and sisters in Christ. Of all the places where there should be peace, you would think it would be here, right? But get more deeply involved in your church and its work, and you run the risk of finding out more than you wanted to know. Because discord, dissensions, and factions don't magically shut off at the church door any more than discords, dissensions, and factions shut off at the door to your home. So much conflict in so many relationships. Thus the bumper sticker: "Losing faith in humanity one person at a time."

But if you have conflict in so many relationships—and everyone does—dare I ask the question? Do I have to ask it? Has it occurred to you that in at least some of those instances, the problem is you? "Losing faith in humanity one person at a time"—what an arrogant thing to say! You should have lost faith in humanity with just one person. Yourself! Be careful about flattering yourself so much that you fail to detect your sin. In our verses today from Romans 12 it says this: *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* You can't honestly say you have always done everything you could to live at peace with everyone. How many times have you paid back someone's harsh words with harsh words of your own? How many times have you paid back someone's selfish treatment of you with your own silent treatment right back at them? How often have you simply run away when conflict arose, instead of seeking to restore peace through a face-to-face conversation? Running away isn't exactly doing everything that depends on you to live at peace with everyone. Peace is not a natural fruit of the flesh. Peace is not the fruit of being human. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit.

The conflicts we have with others are a symptom of a much bigger conflict we have with God. Every time we sinfully harm peaceful relations with another human being, whether through our own aggression or our own cowardice, we are sinning against our God, who has commanded us to love our neighbor. Our sinful ways make a peaceful relationship with God impossible to attain. "There is no peace," says the Lord, "for the wicked."

If you wanted to summarize the good news of God's gospel, you could simply call it a message of peace. Not a message telling us how we should act to make peace with God and with other people. But a message of how God makes peace with us, sinners though we are. Long before Jesus Christ was even born, he was already given the

title Prince of Peace. When Jesus was born, the sky opened up with angels announcing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to men." Jesus himself said, "Go in peace," to more than one sinner, "Go in peace" to more than one hurting soul. After his death for the sins of the world, Jesus came back to life. And the first words out of his mouth to his disciples? "Peace be with you"—twice. The apostles Jesus sent carried with them a message of peace, peace through Jesus. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name. Justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul began the book of Galatians, the same book in which he listed the fruit of the Spirit, by telling Christians like you and me, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever." Jesus loved us and gave himself for us. Jesus did everything he could to establish peace between God and us. It all depended on him. And he did it. We are at peace with God and God is at peace with us through Jesus Christ.

This is essential for us to grasp. Before we can truly live at peace with other people, we need to be at peace with God. Being at peace with God through faith in Jesus is a gift of the Spirit because God the Holy Spirit is the one who gives us Christian faith through the gospel. Thank God, thank God the Holy Spirit that we are at peace with God the Father through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ.

So, now let's talk about living at peace with other people. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, *peace*. Our Christian desire and impulse to live at peace with people comes from the Spirit who dwells within us. Seeking to live at peace with other people is an imitation of God's making peace with us through Jesus. Jesus said it this way: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." We return to our verse from Romans chapter 12. *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* There's a don't and a couple of do's here if we are going to live at peace with other people.

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil.* In the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel, when David was still a young man, he spent months and years of his life running away from King Saul, who was trying to kill David. Talk about personal conflict. David had done nothing wrong to King Saul. In fact, David had faithfully served Saul in the army, and it was David's success that made Saul jealous of him. Saul's jealousy turned into hatred, and so Saul made it his ambition to get rid of David. He made David's life miserable, pursuing him from place to place. One time David and his men were hiding far back in a cave, and Saul entered the front of the cave to go to the bathroom. David's men told him, "This is your chance to deal with your enemy." But instead of killing Saul, David snuck up and clipped off a corner of Saul's robe. David's conscience even bothered him just for doing that. After Saul left, David called after him and showed him the piece of robe he had cut off. David told Saul he spared his life, even though he could have gotten even and killed him. David announced he would not harm Saul with his own hand, but would leave the matter to the Lord so the Lord could avenge the wrongs Saul did to him. And David said something very significant, something important for us to remember in our own conflicts when we are tempted to get even. He said, "As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds.'" David recognized it would be evil for him to repay Saul's evil with his own evil back toward Saul. Remember David's example. *Do not repay anyone evil for evil.*

As for what to do, *Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.* When we are wounded by someone else's words and actions, we tend to get tunnel vision and think only about ourselves. "But I was wronged. I am hurt." And that is important to acknowledge that. Yes, that happened to you. But the next steps are critical. Are you going to be drawn into yourself and think it's okay to do whatever you want in retaliation, justifying your behavior based solely on what your flesh is feeling at time? No, think. Think. Consider what benefits others, consider what others would think of as a beneficial reaction to promote peace, and so avoid a tit-for-tat situation that only draws you further into conflict.

One final do. *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* God's Word basically acknowledges it's not always possible to live at peace with everyone. Peace in personal relationships is a two-way street. If you are going to keep punching me, or you are going to keep lying about me, it's awful hard for us to have a peaceful relationship, no matter what I do. Granted. But God's Word also teaches you and me to focus on our own street. What you can control, what does depend on you. Your attitude, your words, your body language, your actions. Make sure your own street is truly trying to meet at the corner of peace and harmony. Think of Jesus' relationships as described in the gospels. Were the relationships between Jesus and other people always peaceful? No. Were they peaceful as far as it depended on him? Yes, always. The conflicts in those relationships were always caused by someone else, by the other person's sin because Jesus never sinned. Of course we are not perfect like Jesus in the way we live, but the point is that you do what depends on you to be at peace with everybody else. When you have not done everything possible and you have sinned against the peace, go back again to Christ and to his cross in repentance and faith. Christ paid for your conflict with God and your conflicts with other people, too. With God's forgiveness in mind, and with God's peace that passes all understanding guarding your heart, seek peace again. Honestly seek to live at peace with people, with all people. After all, God says that's a really good thing. It's a fruit of the Spirit. Amen.