

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 9
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Sermon by Pastor Daniel Pautz
Be gentle like Jesus

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22,23).

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good (Proverbs 15:1-3).

Many of us don't really like the summers in the deserts of Arizona. We put up with them knowing that's just how it is and that October cometh. But one of the cool things in the hot months of June and July is the fresh fruit in our grocery stores. The peaches and nectarines and plums and cherries and melons! For me the only fruit that edges out a good tasting peach are the Rainier Cherries that are now in the grocery store, but they come with a price. Today once again we walk into the wondrous fruit orchard of the Holy Spirit. These fruit are ripe and fresh all year round. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Today we will look at the wonderful fruit of the Holy Spirit called gentleness.

What definition would you give for 'gentle'? Here is a short list of words for gentle – caring, considerate, courteous, kind, pleasant, and tender. "Being nice" fits well as a definition of gentle. And here is a list of the opposites of gentle – arrogant, bullying, gruff, harsh, haughty, sarcastic, short, snappy, snippy, snooty, snobbish, snarky, snotty, and uncaring of other people and their feelings.

Some think that the definition of being gentle is like being a wimp or a doormat and letting other people walk all over you. But that is not true. It seems to me that being gentle as God wants us to be takes a strong person. My mother was gentle but also a strong person and firm. Each of us seven children knew both her gentleness and her firmness. She did not have to tell us twice to do something, for although she was gentle, she meant business. And the one most gentle of all is Jesus, and he certainly was not a weakling, a wimp. Remember how he, taking a whip of cords, drove out of the temple area these merchants who had desecrated it. "Come to me," Jesus says, "all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Paul made an appeal to the Corinthians with these words, "By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you." Our appeal to you today is "Be gentle like Jesus."

Have you been the gentle person that the Lord wants you to be? How about in your family life? Are you the master of putdowns instead of the rock in your family of encouraging and building up each other? Husbands and wives, in your wedding vows you promised to love and honor and cherish each other. Do you tend to be harsh, short, and snippy with your spouse? Is your tongue so sharp that the Holy Spirit needs to sand it down? Although both husband and wife can be harsh with one another, there is this special and separate direction from the Holy Spirit for us husbands in Colossians 3:19: "Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them." Children, have you been sassy with your parents? And parents, have you been gentle but also firm with your children? Would you speak differently and in a different tone of voice with family members if and when Jesus visited your home? You likely have to join in confessing in the words of the song, "You always hurt the one you love, the one you shouldn't hurt at all?"

A few words directed especially to our teens and preteens. Are you gentle with your siblings and classmates? Do you bully? Sometimes cruel things are said in grade school and high school that are really hurtful. This happens not only among boys but maybe even more often among girls. That's wrong, that's sinful. God calls upon you to be kind and gentle.

How about when someone is angry with you or says untrue and uncomplimentary things about you? How do you react when you get into a political conversation with someone who strongly disagrees with you and maybe even becomes angry with you? It is especially in those circumstances that we are to be gentle and kind and yet we can be firm. The Bible reminds us in Proverbs says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly."

How wonderful our gentle Lord Jesus is! On that first Palm Sunday as he rode into Jerusalem to give his life for the sins of the world he is described as being humble and gentle. He was respectful throughout his trials in both the courts of Caiaphas and Pilate. Even as he was being taunted as he hung on the cross, he did not retaliate harshly but prayed, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." But Jesus was doing more than giving an example; he was fulfilling the law in our place and giving his life in atonement for our sins. Through him your sins are forgiven.

Has it happened to you that at the end of the day as you are about to go to bed, you think back upon the day and say to yourself, I could have and should have been nicer and more considerate and gentle? As you look back upon life, do you with much regret think about the times you hurt people because your words were unkind and thoughtless? As we grow in faith and in God's Word, we also grow in the recognition of our sins and thoughtlessness. That is painful. We might think of the impolite things we said and did, the talking back to parents, the humiliating comments and unkind things you said to your spouse, your siblings, your classmates, girlfriends, boyfriends. You would like to have a recall of your harshness and snippy and cutting comments. But it does not work that way. Think of taking a feather pillow on a windy day to the top of a very high building and then cutting open the pillow. The feathers fly in many different directions. You cannot gather up the feathers. In the same way we cannot undo the harsh and cruel and inconsiderate comments we have made in the past.

But Jesus has picked up all the feathers. You are forgiven. Think about Jesus who has shed his blood for you for your forgiveness. The past is the past. Now live in the present. Tell yourself that with the Holy Spirit's help and guidance you will seek to be gentler. In that wonderful evening hymn and prayer titled "Now the Light Has Gone Away" is the verse "Jesus, Savior, wash away All that has been wrong today. Help me every day to be, Good and Gentle, more like Thee."

Look at the example of Jesus. He often was criticized unfairly. Most of you know the story of the sisters Mary and Martha. As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Notice that Jesus was being criticized by Martha saying that he did not care and that he was not being considerate. Did not care? He the Creator who cared so much that He came to this earth to give his life on Calvary's cross to redeem Martha and all from sin and eternal damnation. What was she thinking? How dare she criticize Jesus, true man and true God?

Notice how gently Jesus dealt with the situation. He did not say, "Martha! What do you mean that I do not care? Where is your head? What is the world's got into you? You need a good dose of God's Word." Rather he gently spoke to her, Martha, Martha – and the repeating of her name was a sign of gentleness and loving concern - "You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.

Do you want to be gentle like Jesus? How can you? The fruit of gentleness begins with having the right attitude, an attitude the Holy Spirit works in us. Gentleness requires that you have the right attitude toward God, the right attitude toward self, and the right attitude toward others. Briefly stated, the right attitude toward God is a respect and love for Him. The right attitude toward self is that although we are sinners, yet we are God's forgiven children with blessings in life and in eternity. And the right attitude toward others is to remember that each of them is a precious blood-bought soul. Being gentle toward others is seeking to copy our Lord Jesus.

You and I have opportunities and responsibilities daily to be gentle.

- Think of the people you meet daily at work, school, shopping – people you know and those whom you do not know. Think of your brothers and sisters. You have opportunities to be like Jesus and be good and gentle to them.
- A special place to seek to be gentle is with a relative who is overbearing – many people have one – or with a fellow worker who is testy. Sometimes you want to give them a good piece of your mind. Make sure it is good in God's eyes. Seek to be gentle and give a gentle answer. You can be firm but be gentle
- Sometimes you might not agree with something at church or with a fellow believer. Maybe nothing needs to be said but if you do, do it with a gentle heart. A hymn verse puts it this way, "Help me speak what's right and good, and keep silent on occasion" (Hymn 461 – see also 459).
- Notice the Holy Spirit's directions when we must correct someone. Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.
- Be gentle when you discuss your faith and religion. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).
- Men and boys, be a gentleman. Treat women with respect. That gentleness is to start already in grade school and high school and in dating.
- Pray the words of Psalm 19:14. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.
- Always remember Jesus.
- Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones (Proverbs 16:24).
- It is important for the growth of the fruit of gentleness to hear God's Word and to receive Communion regularly.

It takes a strong person and personality to be gentle. But through the fruit of the Holy Spirit we can and will be.

Keep me from saying things That later need recalling
Grant that no idle words May from my lips be falling
But, then, when in my place I must and ought to speak
My words grant pow'r and grace Lest I offend the weak.

Lord, let me win my foes With kindly words and actions;
And let me find good friends For counsel and correction.
Help me, as you have taught To love both great and small
And by your Spirit's might To live in peace with all. Amen.