

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Third Sunday in Advent

December 12, 2021

Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

Rejoice in the Lord by being gentle

Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:4-7

In Galatians 5, the apostle Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit. He says, “**The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**” (Galatians 5:22,23). The *fruit* of the Spirit is different from the *gifts* of the Spirit. Not all Christians have the same gifts, but every Christian has the same fruit. The fruit of the Spirit are characteristics that give evidence that the Spirit lives inside of you. The Spirit, who is invisible, makes his presence seen through the fruits that he produces in our lives. These are characteristics that Christians exhibit in their lives. Just like an apple tree produces apples, so also Christians produce these spiritual fruits in their lives.

Well, gentleness is one of those fruits of the Spirit that is important for you and me to have in our lives. In fact, the apostle Paul says in our text for today, “**Let your gentleness be known to everyone.**” Gentleness is something that needs to be seen. It needs to be evident. God wants our gentleness to be known to everybody with whom we come in contact.

But there is a problem with this. The problem is that deep down inside “gentleness” is something that you and I loathe. Gentleness is not something that is natural to us. Just think about some scenarios in your life. When you are driving down the road, and someone swerves in front of you and cuts you off, what is your natural reaction?

If you are a new parent and your infant child wakes up in the middle of the night because he is hungry or has a soiled diaper, what is your first response?

When your spouse says some snarky remark about you or something you did, what is your impulsive thought?

When your teenager ignores your request to take out the garbage, what is your initial reaction?

Do any of us naturally respond with gentleness? No. We are yelling at the driver. We are grumbling as we get out of bed. We are responding with a snarkier comment. We’re yelling at our children to listen to our words.

We find ourselves in frustrating moments, and Paul’s words are *not* the first thing that flits across our mind, “**Let your gentleness be known to everyone.**” No. Anger, frustration, ridicule come to the forefront. Why? Because someone else is not matching up to a certain standard we expect them to be. And when things get outside of how we think things should be, a switch flips in our lives, but it’s not naturally *gentleness*.

But my friends, God says, “**Let your gentleness be known to everyone.**” This is one of the ways we can give glory and honor to God. God calls on us to be gentle because we live in a fragile world among fragile people. Americans like to talk about their strengths and act as if they were in control of their lives, but we are not nearly as powerful as we think we are. In fact, God knows this about human beings. God describes us as dust. Sometimes he calls us a mist or grass. He says we are weak.

And just look at how God interacts with this weak world. He could have very easily looked at this sinful world and said, “I’m washing my hands of it. I don’t want to deal with it. It’s their problem; let them get out of it.” God had every right to do that with us. Every time we pray to God, he could become angry over the fact that we are complaining to him again. Every time we do some idiotic thing in our lives that gets us into trouble and we go to God for help, he could say to us, “I’m not helping you.”

Thankfully, the life of Jesus shows us a different God. He is gentle with us. Instead of sending away all the sinners in this world, including you and me, from his presence forever, he comes to this world and is born as a weak little baby who is dependent on his mother for food. Gentleness.

Instead of using his power to crush the Roman government and the Jewish leaders, he gently laid his hands and feet on the cross and took our hell. Gentleness.

Instead of exposing our weaknesses, Jesus covered them in his blood. Instead of damning us to hell, he gave us heaven. Instead of demanding us to earn our own salvation, he gave it to us free. Gentleness.

The prophet Zephaniah said it well in our first lesson today. “**The LORD your God is with you as a hero who will save you. He takes great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing**” (Zephaniah 3:17). Instead of judgment and condemnation, God rejoices over us. Gentleness.

He recognizes that we were weak and helpless. He took us by the hand, gave us his Holy Spirit, and lifted us up. Jesus continues to care for us, even as weak as we are. Instead of getting frustrated with us, he sticks with us. He's gentle with us.

And as his people, as his family, as his representatives in this world, God wants us to live in exactly the same way. He wants us to be gentle. It's important for us to remember that the people of this world are weak. People are frail. Gentleness involves understanding that the people in your life may not have as much energy as you. They may not be as smart as you are. They may not be as gifted as you. They may not be as focused as you. But gentleness recognizes that they may be weak in that area.

And so that shows us something very important about gentleness. Gentleness has to do with service. It's about serving people, even in their weakness. We all need strength to serve each other. Paul tells us where we can find the strength to do that. He says, "**Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.**" That could mean one of two things. It could mean the Lord is physically near, like God is always with us. He is our strength in those frustrating moments to be gentle with others. The gentle Lord is with us.

Or it could mean that the Lord is near ... like he is coming back soon, any day, any minute, any time. And since that's true, let's not spend our time in anger. Let's deal with difficult people with the strength of the Lord who is coming back soon.

Jesus wants us to have the ability not only to sympathize with people who are weak, but to help them; to use your strength to lift them up and to strengthen them.

Gentleness means to understand that someone else is weak, and to do your best to help someone through their weakness without cutting them off. That takes strength.

It's easy to get angry at a child that's crying in the middle of the night. It takes strength to get up and feed that child without getting angry.

It's easy to let your kids have what they want so they don't whine and cry. But it takes strength to gently say "no."

When your kids are misbehaving or your child doesn't do his chores, it's easy just to yell at them and tell them what to do. It takes strength to gently instruct them and show them what you want them to do.

It's easy to blow up at parents when it seems as though they are not treating you fairly. It takes strength to show them honor and respect in the midst of that unfairness.

That's what gentleness is about. It's not getting angry about it, but it's about using *your strength* to help out and strengthen the weak.

This fruit of *gentleness* is a very rare fruit, especially in today's society. But it is so very needed, especially among Christians. If you really want to make a positive statement in our society, let's try some gentleness. "**Let your gentleness be known to everyone.**" This is what God wants for our lives. He wants us as his people to be gentle. When we live this way, we are letting it be known that the Lord is in us. This is a fruit that shows the people in our lives that we are Christians. Therefore, this is a great way to rejoice in the Lord. **Rejoice in the Lord by being gentle.** Amen.