

SERMON 12TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST - SERMON SERIES: FRUIT OF GENTLENESS

“Living with Gentleness” based on Jon. 4:1-11; Luke 9:46-56; John 8:2-11

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Sisters and brothers in Christ, for the past several weeks, we have been journeying together through our sermon series on the fruit of the Spirit. Week by week, we have reflected on how the Holy Spirit shapes our lives and produces in us the character of Christ.

Today, I want to invite us to reflect on the fruit of gentleness.

Gentleness, much like the faithfulness we reflected on last week, is a fruit that asks something more of us. It is not simply something we do once and then move on. Gentleness is something we are called to practice again and again—to remain gentle, even when circumstances make it difficult.

Because being gentle is not a “one-time-only” thing. It is a way of living. It is something that, over time, becomes part of our character and shapes who we are as followers of Jesus.

But when we look at the world around us today, we might ask: How can we be gentle when everything seems to tell us to hurry or even worse to be violent. How can we remain gentle when people around us constantly test our patience, push our buttons, and sometimes even bring out our anger?

How can we be gentle like Jesus, who continually demonstrated gentleness toward His disciples and toward the people He encountered? Sometimes, it may seem almost impossible. Perhaps we even wonder, “Can I really become a gentle person in a world that so often rewards being loud, forceful, impatient, and violent?”

When we arrive to the discussion about gentleness, we often think of gentleness as tenderness or even softness. Some dictionaries define gentleness in part as being “mild-mannered.” We are being gentle when we are polite and restrained in our behaviour toward others. We were taught to be gentle with babies, towards animals, and other delicate things like ceramic plate or wine glasses. So, gentle become an adjective that at some points, we need to do toward certain things only.

But, biblical gentleness is more than that. Bible taught gentleness is about how we treat others, with our words, thoughts, and actions. It involves having a humble heart and being kind toward others.

Prautes, the Greek word translated "gentleness" in Galatians 5:23, means "to submit one's strength in a posture of meekness." One part of gentleness is to calmly accept God's judgment regarding a situation, even if that judgment results in personal hardship. It is humility toward God. And automatically, when we submit to God, we will also be gentle with others.

Gentleness, friends in Christ, can be understood as a spirit of care, calmness, and humility—a posture that allows us to see other people as God sees them. But in our daily lives, seeing others through God's eyes is not always easy. We may say that God loves everyone, regardless of who they are or what they have done. We may even believe that in our hearts. But when we encounter someone who has been cruel, unkind, or deeply hurtful toward others, that belief can suddenly become much harder to live out.

There are moments when loving someone from a distance is easy, but seeing them as a beloved child of God is much more difficult.

It is easier to accept that God loves people who live like we do—the people who come and serve in church, who watch their words, who volunteer and serve, and those who share the values that we hold. We can look at them and say, "Of course God loves them."

But what about those who have done terrible things? What about people whose actions have caused pain, injustice, or suffering to others? Can we still believe that God loves them? And even if we can accept that God loves them, can we ourselves learn to respond to them with gentleness?

This does not mean that we ignore wrongdoing, excuse harmful behaviour, or pretend that injustice does not matter. Gentleness does not mean weakness, and loving someone does not mean approving of everything they do. Rather, gentleness invites us to look beyond a person's actions and remember that every human being is still someone whom God sees, knows, and loves. And this is where the story of Jonah becomes so challenging for us.

In the story we just read, we see how difficult it was for Jonah to extend God's compassion toward the people of Nineveh. Jonah knew who these people were. He knew their reputation. He knew their wickedness. And because of the way they had lived, Jonah struggled to see them as people worthy of God's mercy.

In fact, Jonah's struggle may feel surprisingly familiar to us. Because sometimes the hardest part of following God is not receiving God's grace for ourselves, but accepting that God is willing to extend that same grace to people we believe do not deserve it. And perhaps that is exactly where God wants to teach Jonah, and us, what true gentleness looks like.

Jonah ch.4 tells us what happened between God and Jonah after Jonah delivered his message to the Ninevites and the Ninevites repented.

First and foremost, we can see that God definitely having compassion on the people of Ninevites by sending Jonah to ask them to repent. God gently remind His people and try to save them when He also need to dealt with His impatience prophet at the same time.

We know that God saved Jonah from drowning, protected him as he preached to the people of Nineveh, and, even after hearing Jonah's many complaints in chapter 4, God continued to gently love and teach him. God even caused a plant to grow and provide shade for Jonah so that he would not suffer from the heat.

At some point, friends, we may all find ourselves identifying with Jonah. And the good news is that God is always patient with us, waiting for us to learn and grow, to trust and obey, and to love others with gentleness. Because that is what God does, and that is what God calls us to imitate.

Living with gentleness means choosing to care for others, even when they may not care for us in return. It means being willing to help those who are hurting, to care for them, to love them, and to treat them as Jesus did—with compassion, patience, and calm words. In the Gospels, gentleness is a quality we can see clearly in the life of Jesus.

Two stories from the Gospels that we just read from Luke and John demonstrate the gentle Jesus and how He guided His followers to the new way of thinking and relating to others.

In Luke's Gospel, James and John are challenged to embrace a different way of teaching and correcting that involves gentleness. In the passage, Jesus has gently scolded them for arguing about which one of them is the greatest. He's placed a little child in front of them and told them that true greatness is demonstrated in welcoming the little ones and caring for the least among us.

Then when they arrived at a Samaritan village where the people are not friendly, and no one is interested in welcoming Jesus and His friends, James and John are ready to show their power and strength, perhaps with violence. But Jesus says, "no need."

We also read the memorable and poignant story from the Gospel of John, where the scribes and Pharisees bring in a woman who has been caught in adultery, and they make her stand before all of them to punish her. The law on the time says that the punishment for adultery is stoning, and here we see that the religious leaders want to test Jesus to see if He will follow the law faithfully.

It is important for us to notice that Jesus doesn't suggest that adultery is okay. He doesn't give excuses for the woman, or even test whether she is guilty or not. He gently teaches the people about what love and forgiving means. He teaches us what love with gentleness means, which is slow to anger and gently handle the critical situation so it will not bring harm to anybody.

What he does do is remind those religious leaders that none of us has kept the law perfectly. Every one of us has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And gentle Jesus does not choose to condemn and punish the woman or any of those men standing there with their stones. He offers grace, he offers forgiveness, he offers an invitation to a new way of life that is moving away from sin and walk towards God.

Friends, practicing gentleness means we love God and having the sensitivity and willingness to forego power for the sake or benefit of another. There is no way we can have a good relationship with God without the awareness of God's gentleness and reflecting it back with our way of worshipping, thinking, and doing in our daily life.

Yes, practicing gentleness to people around us could be done in everyday life. Being gentler when we discipline our kids or grandkids, being gentle when you are driving in the highway or maybe attentively listen to other perspectives when you are in a meeting, or can be as simple as being more kind and patience to the servers in restaurants.

And last but not least, which most people forgot to do, being gentle to themselves, which means we are knowing and aware that we are limited human being, with so much we can do. We open with possibilities might come in the future that might ask more of us, but also know when to stop and rest. And listen to the voice that might ask us to slowing down a bit, cooling down a bit, and stop when it's needed. Because there is no way we can be gentle to others if we are not being gentle to ourselves.

Psalm 13, that we read responsively earlier, might be our words of sorrow. When it's hard to be gentle towards God, other people, and especially when it's hard to be gentle to ourselves.

However, I believe we all know and aware that being Christian doesn't mean life will get easier

and lesser challenge. The stuff happened to us some of it is to train us become a faithful believer and some of it is just part of living in this beautiful but broken world. But as the psalmist trust in God's unfailing love and was able to sing the Lord's praise in the middle of trial, we are also able to do the same with the assurance from Holy Spirit whose indwelling within us.

Friends in Christ, today we are reminded that gentleness is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. We are called to follow the way of our gentle Jesus, right here and right now, in the time and place where God has placed us.

Our calling is not only to become gentle people, but also to be gentle messengers of Jesus in the world today. We are called to share our faith and invite others to know God through Jesus Christ. We are called to speak up for what is right, to stand for justice and mercy, and to do so with love, compassion, and care.

May our words and our actions reflect the gentleness of Jesus, so that when people encounter us, they may catch a glimpse of Christ through the way we speak, the way we serve, the way we treat others, and the way we love.

Amen.