

Sunday, August 20, 2017

Matthew 11:29-30

Matthew 14:22-43

Spiritual Fruit of Gentleness and Faithfulness

We continue in our summer series focusing on the fruit of the Spirit as Paul described in his letter to the Galatians 5:22-23. Paul is teaching the young church at Galatia about the acts of the flesh verses the fruit of the Spirit. Paul describes the characteristics of those who will inherit the kingdom of God because they live by the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is what Paul describes as the relational characteristics we each possess and which leads us to grow. Two of these characteristics are gentleness and faithfulness which on the surface do not seem to be like the other characteristics because they often will describe people overall. She has such a gentle way about her. His faithfulness is seen in everything they do. But in reality- this is what Paul is talking about, the fruit of the Spirit are the characteristics which generally believers live out in what they say and do.

Ladies and gentlemen I ask this question what does it mean to be gentle or to be a gentle man? In years past a 'gentleman' was a man of good, courteous conduct and usually lived a good life overall and situated above a yeoman but not quite and esquire is ranking. In our world where ranking and class is not normally used, how does one share and show themselves to be gentle—men or women? Something may be called gentle because it is soothing or kind, like a person with a tender nature or the soft sound of light rain. But what does it mean to be gentle?

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a wonderful poem describing a man who lived an ordinary life working each day as a blacksmith. Listen to these words which describe this man as he worked:

*The smith, a mighty man is he, With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms Are strong as iron bands.
His hair is crisp, and black, and long, His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat, He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face, For he owes not any man.*

*Week in, week out, from morn till night, You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge With measured beat and slow,
Like a sexton ringing the village bell, When the evening sun is low.*

*He goes on Sunday to the church, And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach, He hears his daughter's voice,
Singing in the village choir, And it makes his heart rejoice.*

*It sounds to him like her mother's voice, Singing in Paradise!
He needs must think of her once more, How in the grave she lies;
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes A tear out of his eyes.*

Every person is powerful because we can speak words that influence others; we can act in ways that help or hurt and we can choose what influences will inform our words and actions. To be gentle means having the ability to constrain and channel that power. To be gentle is to recognize that God's ways and thoughts are high above our own. It is to humbly realize that our worldviews are shared by what we see as sinful. To be gentle means to accept God's worldview and reflect its truth. God wants us to give Him control of our lives.

In Matthew 11 Jesus calls to all who are listening, "Come to me, 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus describes himself as being gentle and humble and we are his followers in faith by choice so therefore we need to be gentle. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that day of Palms waving in the air he was seen as gentle and riding on the donkey. He was calm, he was collected in thought and purpose and he gently greeted those who walked ahead of him and placed palms on the ground. He knew what was to happen but in that moment he was gentle.

Gentleness also means giving up the right to judge what is best for ourselves and others. God is not as concerned with our comfort as He is concerned with our spiritual growth, and He knows how to grow us far better than we do. Having this character trait, means that we accept that rain will fall on both evil and just and that God may use methods we don't like to reach our hearts and the hearts of others. But we must let God do this—he is the one we have given all power over our lives. And if we trust God, He will make a way for us.

But being gentle doesn't mean being so soft on those who are going against Christ's teachings that we say nothing. How we speak to confront makes or breaks who we are and can be. We are to be mild, loving, encouraging and clear about the holiness that God calls us to do.

Just how gentle are you as you speak to loved ones? How gentle are you as you talk and share with others who are in need?

In our second reading from Matthew 14 we read how Jesus made the disciples go on ahead of him to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowd who had been listening to him speak. After they all left, Jesus needed some time and went to pray. The boat was a fair distance out in the lake and the night was soon to turn to day. Jesus went out to join them on the boat but instead of swimming or walking around the shoreline—he walks on the water.. The disciples see a ‘ghost’ walking and are afraid. They cry out with fear. And it is Jesus who yells out, “It’s me. Don’t be afraid.”

But it is Peter who questions Jesus, Lord if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.’ Jesus says, “Come.” Peter gets out of the boat and is focusing on Jesus, walking on the water. He continues to walk toward Jesus but then suddenly he is distracted by the wind, and he becomes afraid as he begins to sink. He cries out, “Lord, save me!”

Jesus reaches out his hand, catches him and says, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” They then get into the boat and the wind dies down. Those who were in the boat saw all of this and said to Jesus, Truly you are the Son of God.

How come Peter doesn’t believe? Prior to the disciples going out on the boat to fish in the evening, they had spent the day with Jesus. Jesus had taught a huge crowd of 5000+ people. Jesus had fed them all with the offering of 5 loaves and 2 fish. He had dispersed the crowds and knew it was time for a break. He sent the disciples out to fish, he went to pray and rest. Then Jesus decides to go to the boat where the disciples are before the tasks of the next day unfold. He walks out and hears his friends fear of the ghost on the water. Peter questions whether it is really him and tests Jesus. But in reality, Peter is the one who is tested. He gets out of the boat and focuses on Jesus. The minute there is a distraction with the wind, Peter sinks. And he becomes afraid. Jesus then states, you of little faith, why did you doubt?

Faithfulness is essential to our everyday living as Christians. It is steadfastness, constancy, and is careful in keeping what we are entrusted with and requires belief in God’s existence, works, and character. Faithfulness comes to us because God’s Spirit is working in us and will save us if we believe. Faithfulness is believing that God is Who He says He is and continuing in that belief despite the changes in life. It means we trust what God says in the Bible and that He will work out everything for good. We trust He will work His will in us. But we must stay focused on Christ. As long as Peter was focused on walking to Jesus, he was alright. It was when he was distracted by the wind that things changed and he began to sink.

We need to be faithful to God, focus on Christ and enable God's Spirit to move us and call us to him. For if we do- we are living by the Spirit. But we must trust God and continue to grow in faith. God sees His Spirit in us, and by faith we will love for him. How faithful are you? Do you enable the Spirit to lead your life?

As we continue to explore the Fruit of the Spirit we must consider also our relationship with Christ Jesus. How focused are we on him? How often are we distracted and do something else instead of heeding the call to worship, learn and grow in understanding who we are and can be?

On this summer Sunday morning we will be doing what Jesus asked us to do- remembering him at the table as we eat and drink the elements of bread and drink. As we receive these gifts, let us rejoice that by faith we have come to know Jesus and are in relationship with him. By faith we can feel the gentleness of the Spirit touching our hearts and by faith our hope is renewed as the body of Christ in this place, sharing with one another in love.

Let us remember this as Christ calls us to come to him. Keep focusing on him and he will lead you always. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER:

Holy God, we come to you this day, gently and by faith. Receive us as your faithful people and call us to know you as we share one with the other in hope. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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