

“COURAGEOUS GENTLENESS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Isa. 40:10-11; Matthew 11:28-30; James 3:13, 17; I Timothy 6:11-12

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for your true and eternal Word and that you have not left us in the dark. Cause your Word to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Honor your Word and edify your people according to our need for your glory. In Jesus name, Amen.

Introduction.

Some of you may have noticed I have skipped over faithfulness as we take up the fruit of the Spirit of gentleness this morning. When I read I Timothy 6 and how it combining man of God and gentleness it seemed like a good fruit to talk about on Father's Day.

Of course doing this has caused me a bigger challenge because gentleness is not often thought of as a masculine trait. Gentleness in men is often equated with being wimpy or weak. Gentleness and tenderness are associated more with women.

These are false distinctions, hurdles we have to get over if we are going to understand how gentleness is a fruit of the spirit all of us are to cultivate. So let's start with the character of gentleness.

Character of Gentleness.

This fruit of gentleness is sometimes translated meekness, humility, considerateness or reasonableness. It is characterized by self-forgetfulness and others-focused.

Gentleness and meekness are not weakness, they are strength of character under control. They are like a great warhorse, a creature of great power who has submitted his power to another.

Meekness and gentleness are having the strength not to resort to coercion or control or abuse or violence.

Strength not to be blunt, abrupt, harsh, demanding, stepping on others or silencing them. Gentleness shows consideration for others rights and feelings.

The gentleness of God.

Each week as we consider these fruit, I have had us consider how God reflects these character traits. All the fruit of the Spirit flow from the very character and nature of God.

When you think about God, is gentleness the first thought that pops in your head? I don't think so. I think of great power, almighty God, creator of the universe, master of all things.

Let me give you three quick pictures of gentleness in the Trinity.

Three pictures in the Trinity.

Isaiah 40:10-11 Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;

...

11 He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Notice how strength and gentleness are in the same passage. Almighty God is a shepherd.

What about *Jesus*, is He like the old hymn, gentle Jesus, meek and mild?

Remember the Samaritan woman at the well or the woman caught in adultery, Jesus was clear, firm and gentle. Confronting sin, but in a manner that holds out forgiveness and hope. And in tenderness Jesus restored Peter who denied Him.

Matthew 11:28-29 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Jesus had all power and authority, He commanded the wind and waves, the demons and spirits, disease. He stood up to the proud rulers of the day. And of course, as everyone points out, He aggressively drove the money changers out of His Father's house.

The world expected a Messiah to come who would take the world by storm with 12 legion of angels at His command, driving out the pagans and taking over. Yet the King of the universe, creator of everything, comes down in tenderness, gentleness. When He is finally ready to make His move, He rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. When He gathers His closest followers for the Last Supper to give them their

marching orders, He washes their feet and says do the same. He humbles Himself on a cross to win our salvation through the power of love.

The Holy Spirit produces the fruit of gentleness in the lives of those who believe and are filled with the Spirit. Gentleness and tenderness are the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life.

There it is, the all-powerful, almighty God of the universe and just judge of all the living, who wields absolute authority, who in no way could ever be called wimpy or weak, is gentle, tender, kindhearted. Meekness and majesty.

Pseudo-gentleness is timid, pseudo-meekness is cowardly. Gentleness and meekness are not the opposite of courage and boldness. It takes the strength of God given by the Holy Spirit to be gentle, it takes courage to be gentle in this world of ours.

Obstacles to gentleness.

Each week as we consider the obstacles to each of the fruit we are aware of the huge hurdles we face. First of all, our very nature, our sin nature is an obstacle. We are our own worst enemies. We are wired to be selfish and proud. Self-centeredness blinds us to the feelings and needs of others.

Second, in a world full of sinners our culture is our obstacle. The air we breathe, the atmosphere we live in is toxic.

All of us are painfully aware of how violence is increasingly dominating our lives. It's everywhere, news, sports, movies, computer games, music videos, even Saturday morning cartoons.

Our culture admires and looks up to power, strength, aggressiveness, competition, self-promotion. Who doesn't like a good action movie or video game with lots of power and aggression? People wear t-shirts saying "Don't mess with me."

Increasingly in our country more and more people are resolving conflict in more and more violent ways. The shooting this past week in Washington DC is just the most recent example.

The business world is dog eat dog. Amazon swallowed up Whole Foods this week. It's the survival of the fittest out there. Nice guys finish last.

We live in an age of power politics with all its mudslinging, attack ads, posturing and lobbying. Social media is a less than gentle place. Texts, tweets, and posts are filled

with put-downs, insults, sarcasm, biting attacks. We pull ourselves up by putting others down.

Who doesn't like a little power, being in charge, making the decisions, being king of the hill? It starts as early as when our parents leave us in charge for a few hours. It carries over to the playground and the pick-up basketball game and group of friends trying to make plans and the church committee. We don't like being lorded over, but kind of like lording it over others.

Our culture equates masculinity with aggression and power, being macho. We are supposed to hide our feelings, no public displays of emotion.

Just as violence is becoming an acceptable way of dealing with conflict in the world, so harsh and mean words are often an acceptable way of dealing with conflict in our relationships.

How many of our own wounds have come from harsh, critical or cruel words from those we love or love us?

One of the effects of all the violence around us is it numbs us to it and how it creeps into our own lives and homes and relationships.

All of these obstacles and weeds in the soil of our society and of our hearts choke out the fruit of gentleness. We will have to work extra hard to cultivate the fruit of gentleness.

Cultivating gentleness.

How can we cultivate and reflect the character of God, the likeness of Christ, and the Spirit's fruit of gentleness?

Cultivate gentleness by praying for it.

Of course this implies that we actually want this fruit, we won't ask for it if we don't want it or think we need it. Do we want to be more gentle, considerate, kindhearted toward others?

Gentleness may be the least prayed for of all the fruit. I hear people talk about praying for more love or patience or self-control, but I don't think I have ever heard someone say they are praying for more gentleness.

Prayer is an act of humility and humility toward God is the beginning of gentleness toward others. If God in His grace has not treated all my sins as they deserve, but has been gentle with me, then how much more ought I be gentle when other's mess up or make mistakes or forget things or don't do what they said they will? Prayer is the seed to the fruit of gentleness.

Ask God to show you where and when you are not gentle, the more specific the better. God will open our blind eyes when we ask, and then He will give us His Spirit's power to change.

Cultivate gentleness by seeking wisdom.

There is a connection between gentleness and wisdom. Wise men are thoughtful, compassionate, caring, considerate, not rash, harsh, hard, impatient, intolerant. He thinks before he speaks, he doesn't fly off the handle, or rush to judgment before having the facts.

Ecclesiastes 8:1 A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.

James 3:13, 17 Who is wise and understanding among you? ... the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, **gentle**, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

Seek God's wisdom in His Word and it will lead you to the fruit of gentleness.

Cultivate gentleness by controlling your tongue and putting off the marks of the flesh.

Ephesians 4:29-32 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Do you judge others quickly and harshly?

Do you make threats or demands frequently?

Do you try to change others by intimidation or domination?

Do people walk on egg-shells around us? Do people cower, run for cover, avoid us?

Cultivate gentleness by speaking well of others.

If we speak critically or negatively about others we will more likely speak harshly to them. Put away gossip and a sharp tongue. Resolve by the Spirit's help to speak well of others. When we love our enemies it changes our words about our enemies.

Think of those who irritate or anger or frustrate you and begin praying for them, asking God's blessing on them, asking God to give them extra grace. Praying for others softens our hearts towards others.

Cultivate gentleness by doing conflict different than the world.

We will always have conflict. I know lots of us try to avoid conflict at all costs but it can't be done as long as we are human and sinful. But we can learn to do conflict different, better.

When we are combative it says our goal is to win, not to hear and understand. But when we trust God with ourselves and the result, we can let others go first or have the last word, we can let others win the argument, we can chose to be silent. Everything doesn't have to be a power struggle.

Cultivate gentleness by giving correction with gentleness.

II Timothy 2:24-25 The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness.

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Correction that is not gentle often comes from someone who is proud, superior, defensive, it's more about them than you. Gentleness is a sign spiritual maturity.

I have spoken before about how parents can cultivate gentleness and love in their home even in the midst of discipline. Effective discipline happens when the parents are the picture of gentleness, power and authority under control, calmly administering the necessary correction.

Parents who discipline in anger are self-focused, it becomes about their pride, inconvenience, disrespect of their authority. It is a control or power issue.

Parents who discipline in a spirit of gentleness, are child-focused, doing what is loving and best for the child, teaching them the right way.

Cultivate gentleness by responding to conflict with a gentle response.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Seek to resolve your next conflict differently. Set out to change old habits and patterns. Resist the temptations to argue or attack, be defensive, use manipulation, to become angry. Call time out and say let's take this slow and with better understanding and communication.

End your conflicts in the home with a hug, a kiss and an I love you.

Cultivate gentleness by doing church different.

By not engaging in power politics, by not trying to just get our own way, by acknowledging the value and wisdom and input of others.

We have our first council meeting this week with the new officers. I am very grateful for the leadership of this church that doesn't act the way the world acts, doesn't fight, doesn't criticize and complain and tear down.

Cultivate gentleness by hanging out with those who are humble, gentle, the least of these, like babies and children and senior saints.

Think of those you know who are gentle, humble. What can you learn from them? How do they handle conflict different? Do they just react or do they pause and control their responses?

Jesus said we should humble ourselves like children. We should learn from children, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. There is a great gentleness training going on right next door in the nursery. We should all spend a little time there.

Cultivate gentleness by asking those close to us who love us how we come across to others.

If we really want to grow in the grace of God and in the likeness of Christ we will have to be honest with ourselves and accept the counsel of others. We can be blind to our effect on others.

Cultivate gentleness by anticipating this week God will bring an experience or situation that will give you an opportunity to grow in gentleness.

Will you be gentle? Imagine owning a Dale Chihuly glass creation? How would you handle it? Gently, carefully, with a due sense of what you are handling. Gentleness is the recognition that we humans, made in the image of God, are fragile, we should handle each other with care. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is in you to do it, ask the Spirit and depend on the Spirit and you will be as Christ.

Men, husbands, fathers, your example and influence are important. You have an opportunity to be salt and light in a culture that desperately needs men who can show a better way to dealing with the challenges and conflicts in life. Cultivating gentleness and humility in a culture like ours will be a difficult task, but never has it been more necessary.

This is the challenge of being a Godly, Christian man. Strength, power, authority, leadership that is humble, gentle, tender. Strength that recognizes the weaknesses of our wives and children and doesn't abuse them or break their spirits.

Remember the words of Peter when he tells husbands to live with their wives in an understanding manner (I Peter 3:7), in a way that takes into consideration her spirit and nature. And Paul tells fathers to not provoke your children to anger (Ephesians 6:4).

Dads need to be god-like in their homes, strong and tender. Able to lift heavy objects and kill big spiders and deal with the monster under the bed, and who can kiss a bruise and wipe a tear.

Able to say no with loving and godly firmness, and say yes with gracious kindness. Tough and tender. Tough on themselves, tender with others. We need to be that strength under control, gentleness and meekness not as the world gives but as Christ gives by His Spirit.

I Timothy 6:11 But as for you, O man of God, ... pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, ***gentleness***. And in so doing you will "Fight the good fight of the faith" (6:12).

Ephesians 4:1-3 I ... urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.