

2 Chronicles 10:1-19  
Matthew 11:28-30  
Colossians 3:12-17

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost  
Midway Presbyterian Church  
September 18, 2022

## **The Fruit of Gentleness**

### *Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson*

In our Old Testament Lesson today from 2 Chronicles we have the account of how the united monarchy—the Kingdom of David—came to be a divided kingdom in the mid-Tenth Century B.C., with Israel being the Northern Kingdom and Judah the Southern Kingdom. It came about when Israel rebelled against King Rehoboam and his harsh edicts. As the Proverb declares, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (15:1) Listen to these words from 2 Chronicles 10:1-19...

### *Introduction to the Gospel Lesson*

In our Gospel Lesson today from the Gospel of Matthew we hear those words that are often spoken in the Invitation in our observance of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Listen to these words from Matthew 11:28-30...

### *Introduction to the Epistle Lesson*

In our Epistle Lesson we hear the Apostle Paul’s charge to the Colossians regarding the new life they are to live in Christ. Listen to these words from Colossians 3:12-17...

### *Sermon*

Today we look at the eighth in Paul’s list of nine fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5. This is the fruit of “gentleness,” from the Greek word *prautēs*, which can also be translated as “humility” or “meekness.” Our Lesson from 2 Chronicles illustrates what can happen when this fruit is absent—when pride and arrogance take over.

When Rehoboam came to the throne of Israel, people asked that he ease the burden of heavy taxation that his father, King Solomon, had imposed on them to finance his many building projects. They were tired from working day and night building houses, roads, high walls, and watch towers.

First, Rehoboam asked the wise elders for their advice. And they answered, “If you will be kind to these people and please them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.” Unfortunately, Rehoboam rejected the elders’ advice. Instead, he took the advice of his younger friends who told him to be stern. And he told the people:

My father made your yoke heavy;  
I will make it even heavier.  
My father scourged you with whips;  
I will scourge you with scorpions.

Wearily, the people went away, and the men of Israel who were from the ten Northern tribes asked:

“What share do we have in David?  
We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.  
Each of you to your tents, O Israel!  
Look now to your own house, O David.”

So all Israel departed to their tents. (2 Chron. 10:16)

And when the king sent an officer to collect taxes from the Israelites, they killed him.

King Rehoboam rushed to his chariot and fled to Jerusalem. And that day the great Kingdom of David was no more. The northern tribes of Israel revolted and chose Jeroboam for their king. Rehoboam was king in Jerusalem, but only the people of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah were left under his reign.

A soft answer turneth away wrath,  
but grievous words stir up anger. (Prov. 15:1)

Dean Hawk, pastor of Rock Family Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, tells this story:

With 150 teens and leaders on a trip to Six Flags, I walked into the hotel lobby to pick up 37 room keys. I discovered that the hotel had lost our confirmation and didn't have any rooms reserved for us. A mistake had been made, and the hotel staff now seemed unwilling to help.

In that moment I had a decision to make. My response to the hotel staff would either distinguish me as a follower of Christ, or it would show me to be just another demanding customer. And 150 team members were watching.

I quickly reminded myself that “a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1). As I calculated my response, I recognized the moment for what it was — an opportunity to demonstrate the power of gentleness....

So what happened at the hotel that night? I opted to be firm yet gentle, and sure enough, my response “turned away wrath.” The issue was resolved with gentleness — and the teens slept in all the available hotel *suites*.

While Rehoboam provides a biblical example of harshness and arrogance, our Gospel Lesson presents Jesus as a Model of Gentleness. Hear again his words of invitation:

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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.” (Mt: 11:28-30)

Rehoboam called for the burdens of his people to be increased. Jesus offered his people relief from the overwhelming burden of the law that had been imposed upon them by the scribes and the pharisees. Jesus said of these scribes and pharisees, “They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others.” (Mt. 23:4a) Religion for them was an endless list of do's and don't's, rules and regulations. What you could eat and what you could not eat. What constituted labor on the Sabbath and what did not. While Jesus had not come to condemn the law, he offered a religion of mercy. A religion that is grounded in love—love for God, love for others, and love for yourself. Yes, Jesus is gentle and humble and offers us rest for our souls.

Today many people believe that the only way to survive and thrive in the world is to be tough. Men—and yes, now women—are expected to show no signs of weakness. “Gentleman” used to be a term to describe someone who acted respectfully toward others. Unfortunately, “ladies” and “gentlemen” are terms that have fallen on hard times. But the Bible teaches us that gentleness is not a sign of weakness, but a powerful tool to promote goodness and well-being.

And, despite the protests of his disciples what a loving and gentle invitation our Lord gives to all who are weary and heavy-laden. He invites little children to come to him and not be hindered, “for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 19:13-15) Jesus is gentle because he knows and understands our needs. He knows the anguish of our hearts, our failures and disappointments. With tender loving care he offers us rest in Him, and the opportunity to learn from him. For our sakes he even makes his yoke comfortable for us— one that is not burdensome, but easy and light. Is there anyone who can be more gentle to us than Jesus Christ?

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
 All our sins and griefs to bear.  
 What a privilege to carry  
 Everything to God in Prayer.  
 (*What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, v. 1)

The Gospels offer several accounts of people who found rest and restoration through the gentleness of Christ. One is Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10) Remember the rich tax collector who was despised by his countrymen? When he heard that Jesus was coming, little Zacchaeus climbed up a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus. And when Jesus spotted Zacchaeus, he said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately; for today I must stay at your house.” The people grumbled that Jesus had gone to be the guest of a sinner. But Zacchaeus declared, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” That day salvation came to the house of Zacchaeus because of a gentle Savior.

Another person who experienced the gentleness of Christ was the thief on the cross beside him at Calvary. Initially, he threw insults at Christ: “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” Later, when he saw how Jesus endured all the suffering and reviling for doing nothing wrong, and showing no resentment, he turned to Jesus and said, “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” To which Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Lk. 23:32-43)

A man told the following story about his wife:

I remember a time when I was sitting on the antique window seat that Helen treasured through the years. Because the original fabric had worn through, Helen had recently recovered it in a handsome corduroy. A heavy storm was in progress, and I sat staring at the rain pelting down on dead autumn leaves.

The gloomy look of the garden seemed to match the mood of hopelessness that had come over me. Problems at work had made me fearful of the future. Basic questions that surface with the coming of middle age had made me fearful of life itself.

I started to light my pipe and accidentally spilled some hot ash which burned a hole right in the center of the window seat cover. Seeing what had happened, Helen calmly threaded a needle and stitched a beautiful flower over the charred spot.

When I looked at the finished work, I realized it was a striking symbol of our long life together, and my spirits began to soar. I had married a repairer of broken spirits, a healer of wounds, a woman whose gentle presence was an antidote to fear.

I understood, perhaps for the very first time, that it was Helen’s deep and abiding trust in God’s goodness that made it possible for her to be a source of light and a harbinger of hope in times of darkness and despair.

Finally, our Epistle Lesson from Colossians reminds us that among the virtues Christians are to cultivate are humility and gentleness. Day by day we are to follow the example of Christ. Gentleness is the fruit of the Spirit that others need from us, especially when they are hurting, as we need ourselves when we are hurting. Just as we clothe our bodies, each day we are to put on the garments of “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” (Col. 3:12) They may not be the latest fashion, but they will do us and others a world of good.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.