

Gift of the Spirit

P3-19, June 30, 2019
Lk 9:52-62, Gal. 5:1, 13-25

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The Gospel reading is a bit harsh.

It takes some imagination to find good news here.

Jesus is laying down a call to commitment.

It's "fish or cut bait" time.

You're either all-in or all-out.

The excuses offered are quite common and with good reason.

"Let me go and bury my father."

"Let me offer a good funeral to honor this loving person."

"Let me celebrate the life of this good person."

All proper and caring.

But that is not all that is behind the request.

In those times, and even now at times,

it was the duty of the eldest to take over the family business.

No matter what the son wants to do with his life,

it was his duty to take over leadership of the family.

Going home to bury the dead

means going home to take over the family,

committing to another destiny,

giving Jesus second place.

It means staying stuck in old systems,

stuck in old traditions,

stuck in the way we have always done things.

Going home to bury the dead

means liking Jesus and what Jesus has to say and all,

but refusing to actually follow Jesus

into a different future, into a different way,

of seeing things differently.

"Oh, yes! I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home."

Perfectly sensible.

Obviously right.

Hugs and kisses and good-byes for someone on a journey.

Promises to write and to come home soon.

That's the catch.

Promises to come home soon.

With Jesus, there is no turning back.

The would-be follower goes back home to secure "plan B."

Just in case this Jesus thing doesn't work out,

just in case following Jesus becomes too risky, too controversial,

there is always a job waiting back home.

But with Jesus, you are either all-in or all-out.

You cannot serve two masters.

You cannot eat your cake and have it too.

Jesus is on to Jerusalem.

"Jerusalem or bust."

Jerusalem or die trying.

Well, either way, Jesus is a dead man.

This is not a happy story.

The would-be followers are sensing some discomfort.

It only makes sense for would-be followers to plan contingencies.

So, when you pray “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.”
are you allowing for contingencies?

When you pray for God’s will to be done on earth, here, at Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church,
are you also planning contingencies,
just in case Jesus asks too much,
just in case God’s way is too risky,
just in case things might change?

Or do you pray God’s will be done,
despite disruptions to your life,
expecting hard choices,
putting up with difficult change?

Paul’s Letter to the Galatians has some things to say about this.

“For freedom Christ has set us free.

Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

Set free.

No longer yoked to a past that will not return.

No longer enslaved to idyllic times that never were all that good.

No longer tied to traditions that stifle.

Set free to enter God’s preferred future,
uncertain and different, but a future that give life and hope.

Then some cautions, “do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence.”

You know that God forgives all sins.

You know that you are always welcome to the table,
welcome to God’s grace.

You know that this church is always here for you.

But “do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence.”

This grace is your second chance at living fully with joy, goodness, right.

These verses from Galatians describe a bit

about what living in God’s kingdom is like.

These verses describe the character of citizens under the nation of God.

I skip the verses on vices,

as salacious as they might be.

Just watch a few Netflix movies

and you will get the gist of fornication, impurity, licentiousness and so on.

“By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit” doesn’t sell as well in this depraved world,

so it is worth our time to expand on a few examples.

Note that “fruit of the Spirit” is singular.

The Spirit’s fruit has all these listed attributes.

The list that follows is what the Spirit of God looks like.

What does godliness look like?

Well, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, among others.

Want to know who is truly Christian?

Well, someone whose life exemplifies some of these things.

Love without expectation,

love with abandon, with pure desire of the best for another,
is a mark of God’s Spirit within.

Joy is that frame of mind that greets each day happy,

looking forward to the blessings God will surely bring,
looking forward to the interesting things in store.

Peace is that confidence that God will see us through no matter what may come.
 Peace is being right with the world,
 no regrets, no one owed, no feeling entitled.
 Peace is comfortable with what is right even if not fair.

Patience is an interesting Spirit mark.
I got things to do; I can't sit here all day at this stop light.
Why can't people just do what I ask?
What's taking so long?
Why is this not working?

And then the mom-voice, "Patience. Patience."

Patience is the *gift of time*.
 Patience is giving *oneself* the gift of pause.
 Patience is taking a moment to consider another perspective.
 Patience honoring the humanity of another,
 recognizing that their behavior and attitude perhaps has merit.
 Patience is the Spirit
 that seeks to understand before rushing to judgment.

Our nation today is quick to judge,
 ready to damn and vilify and cast as evil any opinion contrary to one's own.

We have lost the Spirit of patience.
 We have drifted from the way of God.
 We have caved to the crave, cruel impulses of self and greed and envy.
 This is a nation no longer "under God" because so much is contrary to the ways of God.

Hot-button issues, knee-jerk reactions, powder-keg emotions
 show just how far we have strayed from the Spirit of God.

Patience is God's Spirit giving us pause to consider.
 Patience is Spirit that allows the fuming of another for a time
 in order to hear through the flaming passion that heart-felt value so dear.
 Patience is the Spirit that respects another in spite of their vitriol
 so that connection and community and welcome can begin.

Kindness is so simple, so sweet.
 You can approach the world on the defensive,
 expecting disappointment, suspicious, looking out for self first,
 and your sour mood won't disappoint
 as it seeds disappointment, suspicion and distrust.

Or you can approach the world with kindness,
 that the first encounter is gentleness,
 bearing with the person in whatever mind-frame they be,
 allowing for whatever state they may be.

Kindness is that first reaction that is gift for the sake of the other.
 Kindness is simply seeking goodness as first response.
 We all instinctively know who bears the Spirit of kindness,
 they are the ones we naturally gravitate toward, the ones we like being around.
 Sunday school teachers have that Spirit, and grandmothers.
 A smile and greeting while passing on the sidewalk.
 Holding the door for a mother with a stroller.
 Smiling and glad for the old person taking longer at the grocery line.
 Kindness is so easy when approaching the world from the Spirit of God.

Generosity is recognizing that all is gift,
 that everything we have and all that we are is entirely by God's grace.
 Generosity is recognizing that no one owes us anything,
 recognizing that every joy and blessing and possession and dollar we have
 is all a gift by our God who loves us.

And so, generosity is a matter of faith in God.

Generosity begins with one's relationship to a giver-God.

It then is a short step to sharing what God has given in the first place.

Giving, generosity, living an attitude of abundance,

is an expression of faith in our God who faithfully gives.

Your offering that you give on Sunday mornings

is one of the many ways you give,

and I thank you for your regular offering.

But consider a moment that your offering also is a measure of your trust in God.

Your offering is an indication of your dependence on God.

I won't go into length today on how money reflects trust in God,

but I invite you to struggle with the idea.

Generosity is an expression of one's relationship to our God who gives.

Self-control is ridiculed by our culture that promotes whatever gratifies the flesh in the moment.

It's easy to tsk-tsk frat parties and Cancun orgies,

yet for all of us it is increasingly difficult

to check our anger at Supreme Court decisions, Congress inaction,

and White House depravity.

We have come to a place where home-grown terrorism outstrips any foreign incident,

where outrage erupts in gun-violence,

where it has become common

to demean and call someone names and accuse outrageously.

Self-control has become scarce in American society.

Self-control is checking those base impulses,

and giving goodness a chance.

Self-control is *reclaiming* control

from the messaging and pressures and threats of outside forces.

Self-control is *reasserting* one's own choices for good,

resisting the clamoring and din of corrupting influence.

The Good News for you is that *you know* what is right,

you know the ways of God,

you exemplify the fruit of the Spirit.

The Good News for you is that you already live out the way of Christ

and live into the kingdom of God.

That is what church is all about.

Not building or programs or successful evangelism.

Church is about learning, training and then going forth to live

as God's people,

as God's kingdom.

Church is about seeing each other being so

loving, joyful, at peace, patient, kind, generous, gentle, with self-control,

and being inspired to do so ourselves.

Don't be so bound to the definitions of success as the world insists,

numbers of members, growing budget, dazzling image.

Our success is you people being God's kingdom

demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit in your very being and person.

Amen.