

Midweek Lenten Series: Making Change

Week of Lent 2: Change of Habit

March 11, 2020

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Call to Worship

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob.

That he may teach us his ways;
that we may walk in his paths.

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

The Lord will be our everlasting light,
and our God will be our glory.

Opening Prayer

O God our strength, you are the foundation of our lives. Buildup in us the habits of love, joy, peace patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Guide us by your Spirit and teach us your ways, that we embody your love to all the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Hymn Breathe on me, breath of God **389**

Scripture Reading Galatians 5:16-25

¹⁶Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Reflection

Pros and cons lists. We are often encouraged to write these up when making changes in job, moving to a new home or community or changing our lifestyle. We consider the pros of moving to a different home: closer to work, better neighborhood, bigger house ...Cons: bigger mortgage payments, a fixer upper, older home.

Another kind of list that we might find ourselves doing at times is an inventory of ourselves. On the plus side one may be a generally cheerful person, have great hair, is creative, be good at baking, love running. On the minus side one might be a procrastinator, short tempered, lacking in the ability to face crowds, have difficulty with intimacy.

This scripture in Galatians is also about lists. The first verses list all kinds of behaviors that are desires or wants of the flesh, or put another way, by virtue of being human you may have one or more of these behaviors that can be challenging and unhelpful. I like how Paul puts it, "The works of the flesh are obvious!" And they can be, extra-marital sex, impurity, licentiousness, which can be also described as extravagance, wastefulness, recklessness, immorality and more. Idolatry, think here about how you view money, power, and influence, what you own, any addictions. Then there is jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing. Paul actually lists fifteen desires of the flesh and says this is just a few - there are more like these.

It can be a little depressing to think that all of us struggle with at least one of these things, and most of us probably a few of them. But just because you have tendencies to jealousy and anger for example doesn't mean that you will deal with any or all of the other things. You can be dealing with one of these desires or challenges and not others.

Regardless, Paul does not leave us without hope for he tells us that though the desires of the flesh, of our humanness, are opposed to the desires of the Spirit; those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. You see if we live by the Spirit, we can also be guided by the Spirit.

I have shared on numerous occasions my struggles with anger when I was a young wife and mother. Thankfully God has healed that part of my experience. Jealousy was also something that I had to overcome. I wanted friends to think I was their most important friend. I have come to understand that it was my own poor self-image that made that important. I have learned that I must value myself, no one else can do that for me.

You may have had moments where there was temptation to get involved in an intimate relationship with someone while you were in a committed relationship with another. Maybe you followed through. Or gossip. We don't often want to admit that we gossip, but gossip can lead to arguments and dissension, sometimes going as far as slander. You get the picture.

But through the work of the Holy Spirit we can also work on another list that Paul shared. From Galatians 5:22-23, "By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." And unlike the desires of the flesh, where you can struggle with one thing but not another, when it comes to the fruits of the Spirit they are all connected. When you love and know love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control become intertwined.

This kind of love is a special love in that it is born in the Spirit, through faith. It is a gift from God for the people of God. My prayer for each of you is that you would know God's love for you and God's love would flow from you to others. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can all change our ways of reacting to the world around us and experience the fruits of the Spirit that come from the love, grace, and peace extended to us by God. Go out this day and live in that love trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Prayer (Prayer of Intercession inspired by Galatians 5: 22-23)

*Lord, listen to your children praying,
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
Lord, listen to your children praying,
Send us love, send us power, send us grace!*

Lord, listen to your children praying," words and music by
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Lord our God,
we Your people come to You this day
fully aware that we need your presence and your help in our lives,
yet aware as well that we often fail to stop and to turn to you for that help.
We get caught up in the troubles and the turmoils of daily living—
we become busy with the goals that we have set for ourselves
and those that come to us from our work and our families and our friends.
We strive to be loving, we seek joy and peace,
we desire to be gentle and patient and kind,
to show goodness, and to have self-control—
and yet these things all too often elude us.
Help us, Lord, to root ourselves more deeply in you;
to seek your will for our lives;
to stop and to listen for your voice when we are troubled;
to fully rely on you when we strive to do what is right;
to remember you and trust in you when we are assaulted;
to meditate on your goodness and your gracious will when we begin each day—so that
like trees by a stream which send down their roots to the water, we may produce by
your power the fruit of your Spirit.
Lord, hear our prayer...

Lord, listen to your children praying....

Gracious God,
we remember the concerns and prayers
that have been lifted up this past week
by members of this congregation and our community—
concerns and prayers that we now pray for with them:

For all those who are lonely, fearful or in pain
for those who struggling with addictions and dependencies
that cripple their living and harm the world about them...
Lord, hear our prayer...

Lord, listen to your children praying....

We pray too, O Lord,
for those who come fresh to our minds and hearts this day:
perhaps a family member we have prayed for over many weeks or years,
or a friend who is struggling to find meaning in his life,
an acquaintance who needs healing,
a stranger who needs the comfort of your Spirit as they grieve.
Lord, hear now your people as they pray
and name those names, those concerns, before you.
Lord, hear our prayer...

Lord, listen to your children praying....

Thank you, Lord, for being our God and making us your people.
Thank you for growing in us and for helping us to grow.
Thank you for the ministry you entrust to us.
May your will be done in us and by us,
both now and forevermore. **Amen.**

~ from the Kir-shalom website. <http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermons/c-or13su.php>

Hymn We are one in the Spirit **471**

Blessing

May the God who saves us as a free gift
embrace you with the presence of the Holy Spirit
and lead you to live a life of gratitude and peace.

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year A, Volume 1
© 2013 Westminster John Knox Press. P84.

*Service based from the resource, Sunday and Seasons 2014, Year A.
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