# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Fruit of the Spirit: Gentleness”**

**Matthew 11:28-30**

 **November 14, 2021**

The work of the Holy Spirit is to produce fruit in us so that our character takes on God’s character, so that our life becomes more and more like the life of God. The past four weeks we have examined the work of the Spirit among us as a congregation, bringing about unity, gifting us in our diversity, calling each of us to do our part, and helping us to trust that God will provide all that we need. We have said that the practice of stewardship in the life of the Christian is to take good care of the gift that God has given us. This morning we return to the list of the fruit of the Spirit we find in Galatians 5:22-23, and our topic will be the eighth of the nine fruit, the fruit of gentleness. I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 11:28-30

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

“I am gentle at heart.” We can see the gentleness of Jesus in how he dealt with people, and he is the perfect example of what it means for us to be gentle with one another. Let’s look briefly at three events in the life of Jesus.

In John 4 we see the gentleness of Jesus with someone quite different from himself, the Samaritan woman. [Tell the story: foreigner, woman, bad theology, slow to understand, living with a man not her husband.] Through Jesus’ gentle touch salvation came not only to the Samaritan woman, but to the people of the city as well. Jesus set aside the prejudice of his day and with gentleness included them in God’s gift of salvation.

John 8 shows Jesus’ gentleness with the immoral, the woman caught in adultery. [Tell the story: men brought her to Jesus, law says: “Stone her. What do you say?” “Let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone.”] Jesus was the only one there who was without sin and, therefore, had the right to cast the first stone, but he didn’t. He did not condemn her for her sin. Instead, Jesus reached out to her with a gentle touch and told her, “Go and sin no more.” In doing so he was giving her room to recover from her sinful ways and through his forgiving love to begin a new way of life.

Jesus’ gentleness toward the dishonest is seen in his encounter with Zacchaeus the tax collector in Luke 19. [Tell the story: wanted to see Jesus but was too short to see over the crowd; climbed a sycamore tree; Jesus called to him: “Come down; I am to be a guest in your home today.”] Many despised Zacchaeus for not only was he working for the hated Romans, but he had cheated them in order to gain more for himself. The gentleness of Jesus transformed Zacchaeus’ life, for that day salvation came to his house. In response, he repented of his sin and began making restitution.

Jesus reaches out to the outsider, the immoral, and the dishonest with gentleness. How do you and I respond to people such as these in our lives? Do we engage them with gentleness? What about the person who is not like us religiously, ethnically, educationally, or socially? Will we respond to them with prejudice, or will we treat them with gentleness? What about the one who has been immoral? Will we condemn them, or will seek to gently restore them? What about those who have been dishonest and have profited at your expense? Will we repudiate and scorn them, or will we gently seek to befriend them?

Gentleness expresses love though a tender touch. Without gentleness love does not touch others for God. Without gentleness our touch is harmful instead of helpful, painful rather than pleasing, selfish instead of selfless. Gentleness is the love of God touching another person through us. Those who scorn gentleness, seeing it as a weakness and an invitation to be taken advantage of, say to us, “Don’t be gentle. Don’t let people push you around.” God says to us through his Spirit, “Be gentle, and in so doing, you will push people nearer to me.”