

Third Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C): "Fruits of the Spirit"

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

June 28-29, 2025

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

It's been an ecumenical kind of week ☺. The word *ecumenical* comes from the Greek word for *household*; so something that's *ecumenical* has to do with the whole *household* of faith, not just one particular denomination, like Lutheranism, but **all** of Christianity, **everyone** belonging to the Body of Christ.

There was an *ecumenical* gathering on the lawn of the Quaker Meeting at the Manasquan Circle this Saturday morning. 9 of us Lutherans joined our Quaker friends, standing by a giant banner that said, "We Stand with Immigrants," bearing witness to the Biblical command in Leviticus:

33-34 "When a foreigner lives with you in your land, don't take advantage of him. Treat the foreigner the same as a native. Love him like one of your own. Remember that you were once foreigners in Egypt. I am GOD, your God. (Leviticus 19:34, The Message)

Another Scripture quote that comes to mind is from the letter to the Hebrews (13:1):

Do not neglect to offer hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

On Wednesday another 50 people or so participated in an *ecumenical* gathering here in Fellowship Hall and later at St. Denis: discussion of the 1st episode of Season 5 of *The Chosen*. How much it must please our Lord Jesus, who prayed the night before He died that we might all be one (John 17:21), that Lutherans and Roman Catholics come together to discuss Scripture, including St. John's telling of the Last Supper! A St. Denis friend, a Villanova grad whom I know well from our years of *ecumenical* gatherings, proudly showed me a picture on his phone of the words "Pope Leo XIV" – 14 in Roman numerals, with the V being the same one we see on Villanova bumper stickers!

During Luther's lifetime, another **Pope Leo, Pope Leo X**, was head of the Roman Catholic Church. Leo and Luther were **not** fans of each other.... Luther's 95 Theses that rocked the world were posted in 1517. Three years later, in 1520, Luther published 3 treatises (theological works) explaining his understanding of Scripture and laying out his consequent beefs with Rome. In one of them, *The Freedom*

of a Christian, Luther tried to make nice and come to some common understanding that would prevent the fracture of the European Church, the division of Western Christendom, which did indeed occur through the Reformation.

All this relates to this weekend's reading from Galatians, in which Paul explains:

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. (Galatians 5:13)

It's a theme Paul returns to time and again in his preaching and letters. In 1 Corinthians (9:19) he writes:

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might gain all the more [for Christ].

In *Freedom of a Christian* Luther writes:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.¹

The Gospel never says, "This is who you are free to hate." The Gospel never says, "Believe in Christ and you're free to do whatever you want." On the contrary, Paul says, *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20) My life is not my own. In this passage from Galatians Paul lists "works of the flesh" and warns, *"...those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."* (Gal. 5:21c) We hear "flesh" and we think of sexual sins like adultery, but for Paul, works of the flesh are anything that violates the 2 greatest commandments, that we should love God with all our heart and soul, mind and strength, and that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. For example, Paul mentions something translated as *sorcery*, but the Greek word is more like *pharmacy*. It refers to using various medicines, herbs, etc., to make someone do something they wouldn't otherwise. Making a love potion is one example! Paul also would have disapproved of using mushrooms to induce trances or visions. Another "work of the flesh" he names is *strife*, which one author describes as "the characteristic of one who is regularly cantankerous."² Grumpy people are tough to live with in community. In railing against these "works of the flesh," Paul is naming the attitudes and actions that kill community, destroy peace, fracture

unity: the kind of behavior that sets people against one another, hobbles ministry, distracts us from Christ, and drives away prospective believers.

The flip side of all that are the fruits of the Spirit:

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Generosity
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control

Notice what heads up the list: love! The intro to today's passage from Galatians says:

The freedom Christ gives is not permission to **do** whatever we want.
It is the invitation to **be** what we could not be otherwise.³

The Holy Spirit comes to us in Holy Baptism, brings gifts that we open over the course of a lifetime, and enables us to bear the fruit of the Spirit, helping us be the loving, joyful, peace-filled, peace-making, patient, kind, generous, faithful, gentle and self-controlled people we can **only** be in Christ. That's not automatic, though. God makes it happen, but we have to cooperate! Think of the people you admire most: maybe the parents of a special needs child, or the caregiver spouse of a chronically ill person, or healthcare workers in the most agonizing contexts, like pediatric oncology, addiction treatment centers, or hospice. They do their amazing work by God's grace. Their lives put forth the fruit of the Spirit, the community is blessed, and God is glorified.

I'll end with Max Lucado's morning reflection on this passage from Galatians 5 about the fruits of the Spirit: soul-nourishing fruit-for-the-soul. It's from his book *When God Whispers Your Name*. I have copies in the pulpit if you're interested.

"For the next 12 hours, I will be exposed to the day's demands. It is now that I must make a choice. Because of Calvary, I am free to choose. And so I choose...

I choose Love.

No occasion justifies hatred; no injustice warrants bitterness. I choose love. Today I will love God and what God loves.

I choose Joy.

I will invite God to be the God of circumstance. I will refuse the temptation to be cynical... I will refuse to see people as anything less than human beings, created by God. I will refuse to see any problem as anything less than an opportunity to see God.

I choose Peace.

I will live forgiven. I will forgive so that I may live.

I choose Patience.

I will overlook the conveniences of the world. Instead of cursing the one who takes my place, I'll invite him to do so. Rather than complain that the wait is too long, I will thank God for the moment to pray. Instead of clenching my fist at new assignments, I will face them with joy and courage.

I choose Kindness.

I will be kind to the poor, for they are alone. I will be kind to the rich, for they are afraid. And I will be kind to the unkind, for such is how God has treated me.

I choose Goodness.

I will go without a dollar before I take a dishonest one. I will be overlooked before I will boast. I will confess before I will accuse. I choose goodness.

I choose Faithfulness.

Today I will keep my promises. My debtors will not regret their trust. My associates will not question my word. My spouse will not question my love. And my children will never fear that I will not come home.

I choose Gentleness.

Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice, may it only be in praise. If I clench my fist, may it only be in prayer. If I make a demand, may it only be of myself.

I choose Self-Control.

I am a spiritual being. After the body is dead, my spirit will soar. I refuse to let what will rot, rule the eternal. I choose self-control. I will be drunk only by joy. I will be impassioned only by faith. I will be influenced only by God. I will be taught only by Christ. I will be taught only by Christ. I choose self-control.

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness and Self-Control. To these, I commit my day. If I succeed, I will give thanks. If I fail, I will seek [God's] grace. And then, when this day is done, I will place my head on my pillow and rest."

¹Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, W.A. Lambert, transl., Harold J. Grimm, rev. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), p. 277.

²Edgar Krenz, John Koenig, Donald H. Juel, *Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 Thessalonians* (ACNT, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), p. 81.

³*Celebrate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress), June 29, 2025.