

The Reverend John E. McGinn, Rector  
Saint John's Episcopal Church  
Sandwich, Massachusetts 02563

June 27, 2010  
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Today's sermon is taken from Galatians, chapter 5, verses 1 and 13-25.

Beginning my sermon this morning I, once again, would say to Adam and Finley, we hope that your family, friends, godparents and parents will listen to the sermon with a sense of hopefully taking something away which will help them as they try to bring you into the full Christian life and help you to live life to the fullest.

In sixth grade, a classmate named David Thorpe always wanted his way. Now, I don't think that was unusual in sixth grade because a lot of us liked our own way, including myself who liked my own way. But it seemed that David was the most annoying, whether we were on the playground playing baseball or we were in the classroom having a debate about something, David always wanted to have his own way. He was never "out" at first base, he never was "out" on a third strike - David always wanted his own way. Anything that I did in regard to David always seemed to be wrong. He cried if he didn't get his way, even in the sixth grade.

You know, some people are like that. They want to do things their way or not at all. If things do not go their way, they voice their unhappiness loud enough for everyone to hear. Are there any children in our congregation this morning - now, I know some of them have gone down to be with Linnell - but any of you who watch *Sesame Street*? Probably some of you do. If so, then you know about Oscar the Grouch. Oscar is probably the world's most famous grouch, and he's one of my favorite characters actually. He manages to insult everyone he meets. Of course, if we lived in a trash can we might not have the world's best attitude either.

It's interesting how Oscar the Grouch got his name. In the early days of *Sesame Street*, Jim Henson and Jon Stone, *Sesame Street*'s director, would meet to work on the upcoming show at a Manhattan restaurant. The name of the restaurant was Oscar's Cavern, and each time they ate there they were waited on by a man who was consistently rude and grouchy. He was so over

the top with his grouchiness that they actually went to the restaurant looking forward to what he might say or do next; call it an exercise in masochism, I guess. The result was that the waiter's attitude was forever immortalized on *Sesame Street* in the character of Oscar the Grouch.

You know, I thought of Oscar the Grouch when I read St. Paul's words this morning's epistle in verses 22 and 23 from Galatians, chapter 5. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Wow! No grouchiness there! These are the characteristics of a follower of Jesus. I want to read them again: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Do you know anyone like that? Unfortunately, it's probably easier for us to think of someone with a contrasting disposition. It seems like the workplace brings out the worst in people.

I was amused by an article in *Fortune Magazine*. In the article was a list of some actual lines that people had written in résumés and cover letters. For example, one applicant wrote, "It's best for employers that I not work with people." Tell me, would you want to work with that applicant? Another wrote, "I have become completely paranoid, trusting completely no one and absolutely nothing." Still another wrote, "Personal interests? Donating blood - fourteen gallons so far." Okay. Interesting hobbies might not disqualify a person, but what about this next one: "Note, please don't misconstrue my previous fourteen jobs as job hopping; I have never quit a job." Does this mean he was fired from fourteen jobs? And finally this one: "The company made me a scapegoat just like my three previous employers."

I don't know about you, but if I were an employer I would be looking for someone who embodies the exact characteristics that Paul lists in Galatians - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That's the total package. If I were looking for a mate, these are also the exact characteristics I would hope to find in a person I would want to spend the rest of my life with. What more could you hope for? Some people seem to be born with a sunny and wholesome disposition. For the rest of us the kind of attitude we have is ultimately a matter of choice. We can choose love and peace and joy and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. But here's something I want you to understand. None of these characteristics that Paul lists as fruit of the Spirit depends on external circumstances. No matter what happens to you from the outside, you can possess love and peace and joy and patience

and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control.

The Irish tenor Ronan Tynan, who is going to be singing at the Melody Tent in just a few days, had both legs amputated below the knee after a motorbike accident many years ago. Now, how would you react to such misfortune? I'll tell you how Tynan responded. He went on to become a medical doctor, a well-known Irish tenor and an excellent athlete. In the 1984 and 1988 Paralympics he won four gold medals in the discus, the shot put and the long jump. He even rode show horses. A tall man, he had a special set of artificial legs made for riding. He became an equestrian master. A reporter asked Tynan, "How tall are you really?" And Tynan replied, "I'm adjustable." I love it! I wish I could have an attitude like that. Some of us think that if we lost our legs, the world would come to an absolute end. It doesn't have to. We too can be adjustable.

People who confront difficulties and overcome them are in inspiration to all of us. They are a living testimony to the truth that what happens on the outside of us is not nearly as important as what we have on the inside. What is the key to having the right stuff within? The positive characteristics that Paul lists are the fruit of having the Spirit of God within our hearts. That is obvious from today's epistle that Paul writes. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." In other words, if we want to bear such fruit, we must have the Spirit of God living within us. Somehow people, even within the church family, miss this message. They grow up in the faith, they even come to church regularly, but they are seeking the key to happiness. They're still walking around with a God-shaped void in their life.

And listen, here is the key to life: Pray right now: Lord Jesus, send your Spirit into my heart. That's it! That's the key. It may not happen at once, but it will happen. Pray for Jesus' Spirit to dwell in your heart, and focus on the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. As you do those two things, pray for Jesus' Spirit and focus on these attributes. You will find your life transformed. You will have not only the form of godliness, but also the Spirit of godliness as well.

I read a story about a girl who had a rich and lovely voice. She was singing in the choir of a church in East London. She had this wonderful voice, but she had also been trained in vocal technique. Her fame as a soloist spread

until one Christmas she was invited to sing one of the lead parts in *The Messiah* in the Queen's Hall. One of her closest friend went to her teacher and asking whether she thought she was equal to it. His response was this: "If she focuses on what I have tried to teach her and merely follows the rules of correct breathing and voice production, she will break down. But if she can forget everything and think only of the wonder of the message she is singing, she will be all right."

The night came. This lovely young woman stepped forward. She began singing, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," and the music flowed in great beauty from her lips, and the best hopes of her teacher were fulfilled. She forgot the audience and the occasion and sang as one who knew the meaning of it all. She sang in the strength of the living Christ whom she knew intimately and who was in power within her own life, and as she sang the audience was strangely moved. The night was one to be remembered. Why? Because she was not trying merely to follow directions or obey a set of external rules; she had found the Spirit of power within. Do you understand the difference?

Many people in our world call themselves religious. They keep the rules and the traditions of faith, but they have no music within them. They have never invited the Spirit of God to take up the residence within their lives; and this is how some people are able to deal with tragedies that undo most of us. Someone has said, "What spills out when you hit the road is what you are full of." That's somewhat crude but it's still true. If you're filled with the Spirit of God, that is what manifests itself when you come to a difficult time in your life. If you are full of something else, that is what spills out as well.

A simple exercise brings this home to me. Some of you, I think, are familiar with this little exercise; it is a favorite of motivational speakers. If you have a numerical value to the letters in the alphabet - a, of course, being 1 and b being 2 and c being 3, etc. all the way through the alphabet - and then apply that to certain familiar words, you get some interesting results. For example: *hard work*. Count it out in those numerical values and it equals 98. *Knowledge* counted out in the same way equals 96, but *attitude* equals 100. That is an interesting result for truly *attitude* contributes one hundred percent to a successful life. However, someone has pointed out that *Love of God* equals 101 percent. That is important. No one on his or her own can give more than a hundred percent, no matter what football coaches say.

If we are going to exceed that which the world expects of us, we're going to have to have something more. We need the love, the joy, the peace, the patience, the kindness, the goodness, the faithfulness, the gentleness and the self control that come only from have the Spirit of that living God within us. That's the hundred and one percent that Jesus can give us. Pray for Jesus' Spirit to dwell in your heart and focus on the fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, and as you do these two things, you will find your life transformed; you will find the joy that you seek in this life.

*Amen*

Transcribed by Phyllis K. Briggs

[\[Home\]](#)