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Gentleness

Galatians 5:22-23

Prayer: *Father God, we do again thank you for your grace, we thank you for your goodness, we thank you for, as has been prayed before, the freedom that we still have to come and gather together. Lord, it's a freedom that many of our brothers and sisters around the world do not have. And so Lord, while we have it, we appreciate it, we thank you for it. And Lord we pray that you would, by the power of your Holy Spirit, give us the grace and the wisdom and the ability to hear your word, to understand your word, and to grow in it, Lord, as we hear it. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Galatians 5:22 says this, it says: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

We're going to be looking at the fruit of the Spirit gentleness this morning, and I basically decided to abandon starting off each message by reviewing all of the different fruits because the list is growing so long, I'm spending half of my time just reviewing.

But what I want to do this morning is reiterate again and again what it is I've been saying from the very beginning, and that is that you don't get these wonderful fruits by pursuing them individually as fruits. You don't acquire the fruit of the Spirit known as patience by pursuing patience in and of itself. You get it by pursuing the essence of patience in Jesus Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is simply the essence of who Jesus Christ is. Jesus tells us if we abide in him we will bear much fruit. To abide in Christ is to immerse yourself in him and his life, it is to draw near to him. The more you hang around Christ, the more he is going to rub off on you, and that's precisely where the fruit of the Spirit comes from.

Let me reiterate also that the plan and purpose of fruit bearing is not self-improvement at all. It is glory. And it is not our glory, it is God's glory. *John 15:8* says: "*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*" You see, when folks see the fruit of the Spirit in you and me, God is therefore glorified. And Jesus commanded us specifically to enter into this glory. He said this in *Matthew 5:16*, he said, "*In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*" Now, to glorify God means to put his character and his attributes on display in your life. God is telling us to let the

good deeds of our life display the character and attributes of his son Jesus Christ. But it raises a question. The question is this: What if folks don't get to see my good works? I mean, what if they don't ever connect my fruit bearing with God? I mean, after all, the fruit of the Spirit has its counterparts in highly attractive behavior by anybody, not necessarily Christians. You know, everyone finds love and joy and peace and patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control immensely attractive and not necessarily connected at all to God. So what if I'm faithful and kind and gentle and patient without being -- people being able to draw some kind of connection between my exercise of those fruits and the gospel? What happens when I display this fruit in ways that don't connect it at all to the Holy Spirit? Is it wasted fruit? I mean, does it go bad? Well, first of all, there's a much bigger picture here than what first meets the eye. You see, human beings are not the only witnesses to God's glory in our fruit bearing. *Hebrews 12* says: *We are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.* Think of it. Someone is watching us all the time. God says that the church itself is the place where his wisdom is put on display not just to our neighbors and not just to your fellow church goers but also to spiritual beings and powerful authorities that we can't see or know just yet. *Ephesians 3:10* says: *Now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the*

heavenly realms. You see, God is telling us that he displays his wisdom to the spirit world through his church, and folks, that's us. We're on display and we don't even realize it. You see, when God saves us, he immediately begins the process of remaking us into the image of his Son and we say to what purpose? *Matthew 5:16: "That they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."* As I said, glory is really about making God's character known. And so what we have here is God telling this world and this cloud of witnesses and the powers and the principalities in the heavenly places that his manifold wisdom can transform empty lives into lives whose purpose is to display the essence of his Son, Jesus Christ. That's exactly what the fruit of the Spirit is. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control displayed in our lives brings honor and glory to God in places we have not even imagined yet. So I think we can rightly conclude that there are other cosmic purposes to this notion of fruit bearing. And this morning we're going to look at gentleness. It's just one of the fruits.

So let's just jump into it. *Prates* is the Greek word for gentleness. It means gentleness. Very helpful. It also means humility and meekness. In fact, the very same Greek root is translated in *Matthew 5:5* as this: "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*" There's an old joke that I tell about

meekness. I've told it too many times but it bears repeating. It says there's a sign above the clubhouse of the meek and the sign says -- it quotes *Matthew 5*, and it says, "*The meek shall inherit the earth*," and then directly underneath that sentence is a parenthetical statement that says: "...if that's okay with you." You see, that's the popular misconception about what gentleness or meekness really is. The popular misconception of what a meek or gentle person is is that he's Casper milk toast or Pee Wee Herman depending on what generation you're from. He's someone who is puny, someone who is weak, someone who is pathetic. That's the portrait of the popular understanding of what a meek and gentle person is today, and it couldn't be further from the truth. You may have heard of a biblical definition of meekness as "power under control." That's a lot closer to the truth. Another definition that is helpful is that gentleness means -- quote -- "refusing to exercise the severity of righteousness." That's refusing to employ your own personal power to enforce your own rights. You see, the meek or gentle person is someone who is no longer operating under the burden of having to look out for number one. A gentle person, biblically speaking, is someone who has learned to trust totally in the fact that God ultimately will always have his back. Now just imagine the resources that you would have available to yourself if you no longer had to worry in the slightest about whether you were being slighted or ignored or mistreated, but virtually all of those

concerns you were able to fully place in the hands of God. How much spiritual energy do you think that would give you if the last person on earth that you had to worry about was you? See, the whole point of meekness is that you no longer seek out the ability to get even or to get back or to best your enemies. You take the power that you have, whatever power that is, and you refuse to exercise it in getting other people to see the world the way you see it.

Let me give you some examples of gentleness from scripture. Speak about Elijah a bit. Elijah was this great prophet of God, and by God's instruction he called down a devastating drought on the nation of Israel, and in the midst of the crisis that that caused, he went to live with a widow and her young son. Now because of the drought, the widow was facing starvation, but Elijah miraculously instructed her to draw oil and flour from two tiny jars that never went empty and so together they all managed. And that is they managed until the unthinkable happened, the widow's son suddenly took ill and he died.

Here's how the scripture describes it. This is 1 Kings 17, it says: *After this the son of the woman, the Mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O,*

man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!" Now Elijah has brought nothing but blessing into this widow's home. I mean, since he has arrived, she and her son were one of the only people in the area that were not facing starvation. But when bad things happen, well, the widow has a very disturbing response: "You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!" Elijah, you killed my son! Not fate, not disease, not even God but you, Elijah, you are to blame for this. Now, have you ever been in a situation where something bad has happened and folks, well, they may know that you're a Christian, so they turn to you as if you and God were both equally responsible. Or if God is the one that they think is at fault, somehow you are expected to be God's lawyer for the defense. This is a time where meekness and gentleness is often necessary but very hard to find. You see, two things happen at that moment, one is our desire to defend God, the other is our desire to defend ourselves. First of all, let me tell you, God needs no defense at all from anyone, let alone me. You know, many a time I've adopted a lawyerly approach as I've sought to explain God's ways to people who are baffled by sickness or pain or struggle and almost always that is not what they were looking for. They're looking for someone or somebody to deflect the pain into something that they can deal with. In all likelihood, they're looking for someone to feel that pain with them. Far better to

simply enter into that pain and share their hurt rather than launch into a defense of God. You know, most of the time that I've done that, I've realized I was much more interested in defending myself and my choice to be a Christian than I was in defending God himself. So far better to say, "I ache with you." Better still it would be to say what God himself says in *Romans 12:15*: *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.* Now Elijah, he could have said, "I've been nothing but a blessing to you and the death of your son's got nothing to do with me." He also could have agreed with the woman and said, "Perhaps your sin has found you out, woman. Perhaps God is punishing you." That would have been the easy way out. But he does neither. You see, his power over her is completely under control, and he refuses to enter into the severity of his own righteousness; instead he exercises gentleness. This is what he says in verse 19, it says: *And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into an upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. And he cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?"*

You see what Elijah's doing here? Safely out of her presence, Elijah is pouring out his grief and his bewilderment to the one who's responsible ultimately for everything including the death of

this child. And as gentle as Elijah is to the widow, he's not so gentle towards God. But you know, it was okay, because it's okay to question God. Even the prophets questioned God. The prophet Jeremiah was even more blunt than Elijah. God gave him this ministry of prophesying destruction, and Jeremiah paid dearly for that. At one point he claimed that God himself had suckered him into this ministry. In *Jeremiah 20*, he says: *O LORD you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me.* See, Jeremiah felt safe enough to unload on God. The question is do you feel safe enough to do that? You see, it's okay to bring your fears and your bewilderment and even your anger before him to honestly express what it is you're feeling. I mean, after all, it's not as if you and I can hide anything from the God who knows our very words before we even speak them. And he's willing to tolerate our faithlessness because he knows we are dust and that time itself will prove him trustworthy. Elijah and Jeremiah and you and I have but one source for gentleness to grow within us. It is knowing that we have a God that we can trust, a God who has our back, a God who will go before us. We don't have to demand our rights, particularly our right not to be falsely accused like Elijah was if we understand we serve a sovereign God who will in time make everything right. And it is that knowledge that allows us to grow the fruit of gentleness. It's what allowed

Elijah to see God at work. Listen to what he says. This is verse 21. It says: *Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives." And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."*

Let's take a look at Joseph. Joseph is another man who practiced the fruit of gentleness. And we all know the story, I mean, Joseph's brothers were jealous that he was dad's favorite and so they wanted to kill him. But first they decide they're going to kill him, then they settle for throwing him into an abandoned cistern. They bring his coat stained with goat's blood back to his father claiming that he was torn to pieces by animals. And most of you know the rest of the story, Joseph gets kidnapped and sold into slavery, he manages his first owner's household brilliantly, then he gets accused of rape and gets thrown into jail where eventually interprets the dreams of the king's servants and so he's brought into the presence of the king where he gains the favor of the king by interpreting his dreams. And so he winds up becoming the vice

regent over all of Egypt, this position of almost limitless power. And he skillfully guides Egypt through a seven-year famine that is so extensive it forces a certain family to come to him seeking food to buy. Well, that family is Joseph's brothers. And they're completely unaware and for that matter completely uncaring about whatever happened to their brother because as far as they know, he's dead. They have no idea he is their ruler who now has the power of life and death over them. So the brothers are ignorant, they're desperate, and they are hopeless. They have no idea that Joseph is all powerful and Joseph knows exactly who they are. The scene is a classic display of power. This is the moment for Joseph to gain his revenge. But he doesn't. Instead he practices the fruit of gentleness. This is profound power under profound control. This is Joseph refusing to exercise the severity of righteousness that could have demanded their lives. So instead of taking his vengeance, Joseph feeds and he clothes and eventually houses his whole extended family, putting them in the safety of Egypt. Well, eventually Joseph's father Jacob dies. His brothers begin to think, they begin to wonder if Joseph's gentleness was too good to be true, that he was simply waiting for his father to die before he would take his pound of flesh.

We pick up on the story at *Genesis 50:15*. It says this: *When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It*

may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, 'Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. Understand something. Joseph spoke kindly and gently to his brothers because he understood where his ability to let go of the bitterness came from. You see, over the years he had seen the sovereign hand of God guiding every single aspect of his life including all of the terrible things that had happened. So he was able to say very clearly and very bluntly to his brothers: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about so that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones."

Joseph could have demanded their lives. Instead, he chose

gentleness. You see, gentleness and meekness is not at all the same as niceness and weakness. It is borne out of the certain knowledge that there's a sovereign God who is in charge, who will in the end make everything right. The more you buy into that, the more you are free to be gentle. You know, Elijah was meek and he was gentle when he was faced with these false accusations. Joseph, he was meek and he was gentle when he was faced with false imprisonment. But Jesus, Jesus was meek and gentle when he faced certain death at the hands of his own creation. You talk about power under control. Elijah had the power of a prophet, Joseph had the power of a prime minister, but Jesus had the power of the creator, sustainer, and ruler of the universe. There's not a more profound example of meekness and gentleness of ultimate power under ultimate control and an absolute unwillingness to demand the severity of righteousness than these words of Jesus in *Luke 23:33*. It says: *And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!"*

Jesus is our supreme example. I mean, what Elijah and Joseph pointed to, Jesus perfectly expressed. There should have been a bare patch of scorched earth representing what used to be the bodies of those who would dare to nail God to a cross. The only reason that didn't happen was because of the gentleness of Jesus. When Jesus was about to be arrested, Peter struck out at one of the soldiers, and Jesus said in *Matthew 26*: "*Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?*" Jesus refused to employ the severity of righteousness. He was the most gentle person who ever walked the face of this earth. He even declared his gentleness in *Matthew 11*, he said this: "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*"

No one's ever exhibited more power under more control than Jesus did. Nevertheless, there's something that we have to say at this point. You see, there is much that Jesus had to say that appears anything but gentle. I want us to consider a number of scriptures. Consider first *Matthew 10:34*. This is Jesus' words. He says: "*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not*

come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household." Hardly the words of gentleness. Jesus also spoke these words in a parable about returning unexpectedly to find wicked servants acting wickedly. This is what he said in Luke 12, he said, "But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and he begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful." This same Jesus spoke about corporal judgment that he would one day be levying against whole cities based on their rejection of the truth. In Matthew 11 he said this: "And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you." He also went on to speak about a terrifying individual judgment that he would levy against any and all who attempted to enter the kingdom of heaven outside of the righteousness of Christ alone. This is what he said in the parable in Matthew 22, he said: "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding

garment. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

Here's the issue. Here's the question. How do we reconcile a gentle Jesus, bearing a sword, cutting people in pieces, and casting people into outer darkness? How do we deal with that? Well, first we have to recognize that the problem is not God's. The problem is ours. You see, we have created for ourselves a one-dimensional God who is all love and no judgment. That God is a mythological idol that we have created and has nothing to do with the real God. You know, folks just assume that it's gospel to say that God's gentleness and mercy are limitless. The scriptures I just read bear out the fact that they are not. Can I tell you why that is a good thing? You see, if you believe in a God who is nothing but one-dimensional love without any holiness or justice or severity, then why would you ever trust in that God in the end to bring about justice? Gentleness or meekness is power under control and the severity of righteousness not demanded because we trust that in the end God is the one who's going to make all things right. Take that away by making God into this mushy God who only wants to make sure everyone is happy, and you take away our reason

for gentleness. Think about it. If the butchers of Christians in the Middle East have nothing to fear from a God who is all forgiving and a hell that is nonexistent, well then, why in the world should I care about being gentle to my nasty neighbor? I mean, if God isn't kidding when he said that anyone who has beaten and mistreated anyone else thinking he would get away with it doesn't realize that the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. You see, when justice is certain, then kindness and goodness and meekness and forgiveness is more readily available. Just picture a sovereign God. Picture a God who rules over every single molecule in the universe and understand that that is the God who promises you and me that ultimately his justice is going to prevail. Now the language may not be pretty, but God says to the wicked city of Capernaum, they will one day wish they were Sodom when they behold the vengeance that God's going to wreak on them. God says to the servant who beats and abuses those he's in charge of, "I'm going to cut you in pieces."

Now, there are many who find this aspect about God offensive. They understand only a God of love and they're offended at the idea that God's justice is just as keen as his love. What they don't understand is that the ability to trust in that justice is the only

thing that frees us up to be gentle. It's why God insists in 1 Peter 2:21, this, this is what he says: *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."*

Now there's a statement in that scripture that is the key to growing the fruit of gentleness within each of us, and oddly enough it has more to do with vengeance than it does with gentleness. It's verse 23: *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* Jesus was able to be gentle because he left the issue of justice in his Father's hand. He entrusted himself to him who judges justly. You see, a meek and gentle person is someone who has fully internalized and understood what God was saying when he said in Romans 12:19: *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."*

Jesus is the greatest example of gentleness we will ever see, but

his gentleness is rooted in his Father's justice. Let me put this in context with what is going on all around us today. You know, I hope you saw the letters that are taped on our church doors. I have one right here. I spoke about this last week. You know that symbol that we placed on our door, it's the Arab symbol for the letter "N" which stands for the Nazarene which is the symbol that ISIS is now painting on the doors they intend to kill or displace as they sweep through Iraq and Syria. That symbol is rapidly becoming a sign of our solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world who are seeing extreme violence simply because they claim Christ as savior. And whether it's in the Middle East or Africa or eastern Europe or southeast Asia, we are seeing brutal bloodshed and persecution breaking out against Christians all over the world and so we need to ask ourselves, how do we respond to this? You know, if you and I had the power to wipe ISIS off the face of the earth, would you do it? It's very important for me to rephrase the question this way. Would you delight in doing it? I just want to add, I'm grateful that we've begun air strikes against ISIS, I'm grateful if it gives Christians and any other groups in that area a tiny chance to escape. I believe we should be doing whatever it takes to stop genocide from taking place not just against Christians but against any oppressed group, but you know, it's very easy for us to opine about what we think is right or wrong in the Middle East from the safety of the United States.

So let me bring the question of gentleness and meekness right down to the place where you and I live. The question is this: How would you react if it was your wife getting raped, your sisters being kidnapped, and your brothers having their throats slit? Would you respond with gentleness? I mean, if you were in a position of power like Joseph was, what would you do?

Miroslav Volf is a man who was born in Croatia. He's now a theologian at Yale University. He makes the case that our desire to want vengeance on our enemies is directly related to our deficient view of the notion of God's justice and sovereignty. Mr. Volf knows what he's talking about. He's someone who did not have the luxury of the safety we all enjoy. He experienced wholesale the slaughter and terror of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and he writes this in his book *Exclusion and Embrace*. He says this: "My thesis is that the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance. My thesis will be unpopular with man in the West, but imagine speaking to people (as I have) whose cities and villages have been first plundered, then burned, and leveled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit. You point to them -- we should not retaliate? Why not? I say -- the only means of prohibiting violence by us, is to insist that violence is only legitimate when it comes from God. Violence

thrives today, secretly nourished by the belief that God refuses to take a sword. It takes the quiet of a suburb for the birth of a thesis that human non-violence is a result of a God who refuses to judge. In a scorched land -- soaked in the blood of the innocent, the idea will invariably die, like other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind if God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end of violence, that God would not be worthy of our worship."

We are the ones that Volf is speaking to. We're the ones who live in the suburbs to whom the idea of throats slit and daughters raped is only a nightmare. What the comfort of the suburbs grows is the notion that a God who wreaks havoc and vengeance on his enemies is a God too violent for our tastes. But a God who refuses to pursue justice is a God who offers nothing to those who are suffering injustice. And we are living today with a reality that for many of our brothers and sisters particularly in the Middle East, injustice is their reality. And the idea that God says "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," this is the only hope these folks have. You see, all of us have a simple longing just for things to be fair, for good to win out in the end, for evil to be punished. And faith insists that in the end we have a God who will make all things fair. Faith accepts the violence of temporary injustice because we know in the end, there's a God who's going to make all things right. We know

justice is coming because God says so. In Romans 2:4 he says: *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. Romans 11 says: Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.*

See, we as a culture embrace the kindness of God's mercy while rejecting the severity of his judgment. And when we reject that judgment, we find it almost impossible to accept his justice. But it's the hope of justice that gives us the room to be gentle. It is our brothers and sisters around the world suffering persecution who have to deal with the extremes that we're speaking of. You know, we have to deal with a far less rigorous form of the same thing. It may be that our relationships, our reputations, or our salaries, maybe those are the things that get slashed instead of our throats, but the principle still applies. You see, gentleness, that idea of power under control becomes real when we refuse to exercise the severity of righteousness, when we refuse to demand our way, and the only way we can truly do that is by following exactly what God calls us to do in 1 Peter 2, he says this: *To*

this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."

The spotless Lamb of God hung on a cross to pay the price of my sin. God says there was never even a hint of deceit in his mouth, yet he was mocked and derided like a common criminal. And we know that Jesus alone had the power to flip the script and make his tormenters the ones tormented. Instead he said, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* And he is the example of gentleness to which all of us are called. Once again, I can't say it better than Peter did. He said: *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* And so here's the question: Are you willing to trust yourself to him who judges justly? If you are, then gentleness will be the fruit you bear. Let's pray.

Father God, we do thank you for the supreme example you are of

gentleness, of power under control under the refusal to exercise the severity of righteousness. Father, our hearts ache when we see what is happening around the world. Our hearts also ache when we understand that we are in a culture that has no understanding of the severity of your righteousness, of the severity of your judgment that is coming. Lord, we accept that, we honor that, because we understand without that justice, there is no hope for those suffering injustice. Give us the ability to trust fully in that justice so that we can practice the gentleness you would have us practice, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.