

Well tomorrow is the day Canadians go to their local polling place to cast their vote in the 42nd Canadian general election to determine who will be the members to the House of Commons of Canada – which will end the 78 day long campaign full of signs, slogans and political promises. On the other hand, south of the border, the U.S. general election campaign season has been in its beginning stage for at least 120 days and it will not get into full swing until February, which will continue until its citizens go to their local polling places on November 8, 2016. Those of you who have been following politics in the states know that the two leading candidates for the office of president from conservative Republican Party are - the caustic, egotistical billionaire Donald Trump and the quiet, humble, retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson. Both of these men are considered to be uniquely both qualified and unqualified to run for president because neither man is a politician – and neither man has ever run for office or has ever served in public office.

But that’s about where their commonality ends because just as their personalities are starkly opposite from one another - so are their backgrounds and place in life totally divergent from each other. While Donald Trump was born into wealth and raised by influential parents and attended private schools - Ben Carson was born into poverty in the hardened climate of inner-city Detroit and raised by a single mother who had dropped out of school in the third grade. She worked two or three jobs at a time in order to provide for her two boys – and as both Ben and his brother experienced difficulty in school, she required them to read two library books a week and give her written reports, even though she could barely read them. She would take the papers and pretend to carefully review them, scanning over the words and turning the pages, before placing a checkmark at the top of the page to show her approval. Ben struggled in particular with behaviour; he had a violent, uncontrollable temper and was known to get angry and attack at the slightest provocation. One time he tried to hit his mother with a hammer because she disagreed with his choice of clothes. Another time, he inflicted a major head injury on a classmate in a dispute over a locker. In a final incident, Ben nearly stabbed to death a friend after arguing over a choice of radio stations. The only thing that prevented a tragic occurrence was the knife blade broke on the friend's belt buckle. Not knowing the extent of his friend's injury, Ben ran home and locked himself in the bathroom with a Bible. Terrified by his own actions, he started praying, asking God to help him find a way to deal with his temper. God touched and changed his heart when he read Proverbs 16:32: *“Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”* It was then Ben realized that much of his anger stemmed from putting himself rather than God in the center of everything. In putting God first his view of life, of himself and of others changed – his behaviour improved, his temper abated and his grades excelled, graduating with honors from high school. From there Carson literally worked his way through university and medical school, and he ultimately became a world-renowned neurosurgeon – as on September 4, 1987, Carson led a team of 70 doctors, nurses, and support staff in separating two 7-month-old twin boys who had been born joined at the head, the first surgery of its kind. When Ben Carson launched his official bid for the Republican presidential nomination he said: *“I’m not a politician and I don’t want to be a politician because politicians do what is politically expedient. I want to do what’s right.”*

Well, we want to *do what’s right* rather than what is expedient with God’s Word this morning. And in order to do so we need to metaphorically surgically separate two twin words that seem to be interchangeably connected in the context of our message for today (Gal. 5:16-25). After Paul wrote: *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh”* (Galatians 5:16) he then lists the *“works of the flesh”* that are evident when we do try to *“gratify the desires of the flesh”* – after which he then writes: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law”* (Galatians 5:22-23).

God's Word tells us here that we will *not* have *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"* in our hearts when we live out our lives in the *"flesh"* - but when we *"live by the Spirit"* and *"keep in step with the Spirit"* we will bear the *"fruit"* of *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"* by the power of the Spirit. Once again, remember that we have seen that *"the fruit of the Spirit"* in the life of a born-again Christian is the emotional, intellectual, and physical manifestation of that person's spiritual life that has been dramatically and powerfully transformed by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. Remember also that the *"fruit of the Spirit"* is not something we can do or achieve, but rather a gift of God's mercy and grace we receive and experience when we humbly surrender our hearts, minds and wills to Holy Spirit. The only *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"* we can know here on earth is that which is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Today the *"fruit of the Spirit"* we are looking at is *"kindness"* - which sometimes in the Bible and often in our own minds is interchangeably connected with the twin word *"goodness"* which we see directly follows *"kindness"* in our fruit of the Spirit list. Now we will see that it does make sense to couple these two words interchangeably together as twins when we're studying the fruit of the Spirit, because they're actually closely related. The original Greek word translated as *"kindness"* here literally means "the moral excellence of a gentle character." One translator writes that this *"kindness"* is "a gentle temperament which radiates peace and refrains from doing harm" and another translator tells us this word speaks of "a kindness of grace which pervades the whole nature, a mellowing of all that would be harsh and grim." Now the original Greek word translated as *"goodness"* is a different Greek word from *"kindness"* in that it is a much more an *active* term as *"goodness"* is generally defined as "a generous character in uprightness of the heart expressing itself in active good towards others." And so while *"kindness"* speaks of a gentleness of character and inner heart toward others - *"goodness"* is then the *generous action* of that *gentleness of character and inner heart toward others*. Today we are focused on *"kindness."*

Kindness as the gentleness of character and inner heart toward others is difficult for us because we are not naturally inclined to feel kindness towards others. The world, our culture, the devil and our fallen nature tells us we are the center of the universe and urges us to dismiss others and concern ourselves with our own wants and needs. Even right now some of us are probably railing against this, arguing that some of us truly do have gentle and compassionate hearts towards others. Well that may be true, but if so, that's not us - that's the Holy Spirit. We have already seen in Galatians 5 that we will *not* have *"kindness"* in our hearts when we live out our lives in the *"flesh"* but when we *"live by the Spirit"* and *"keep in step with the Spirit"* we will bear the *"fruit"* of *"kindness"* by the power of the Spirit. In Galatians 5:17 Paul tells us: *"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."* Paul affirmed this struggle in his own life in Romans 7, as our remaining sin in our flesh continues to battle against any kind of beneficial, tender concern inspired by a gentleness of character and inner heart towards others. The only *"kindness"* we can show towards others here on earth is that which is empowered by the Spirit.

Now issues of our character and our inner heart seem to be somewhat ambiguous or nebulous because in our fallen state we are not able to clearly discern the condition of our own character and hearts. What this means is Holy Spirit empowered fruit of *"kindness"* is much harder to come to grips with than the Holy Spirit empowered fruit of *"goodness"* - because *"kindness"* speaks of a *gentleness of character and inner heart* toward others and *"goodness"* is the *generous action* of that gentleness of character and inner heart toward others. Because it is our fallen tendency to focus on *what we do* rather than *who we are*, the spiritual fruit of *"goodness"* (which we will be looking at next week) is much easier to discern - because we can see the *"goodness"* of an *outward action of generosity* but we cannot see the *"kindness"* of an *inner attribute of gentleness*.

A simplistic answer to all of this would be to simply say that an *inner attribute of gentleness* is the *cause/source* and an *outward action of generosity* is the *effect/result*. Or in other words - "*goodness*" is the consequence/outcome of "*kindness*." But that would not necessarily be true because the "*goodness*" of our *outward action of generosity* towards others could easily flow out of an abundant number of selfish reasons or motivations, many of which we may not and most probably would not, even be aware of. But that being said, God's Word does reveal what the gentleness of character and inner heart of the "*kindness*" of God is like - which should be the model for our spiritual fruit of "*kindness*" - as we have been created in the image of God.

The apostle Paul uses the Greek word for "*kindness*" ten times in eight different verses in the New Testament. One of those verses is Galatians 5:22, which we have already seen is the context our series of messages on the fruit of the Spirit. It's in the other verses in God's word where we can sense and know and understand the *gentle character of the heart of God expressing itself in generosity towards us*. This is the gentle character and inner heart of the "*kindness*" of God that should be generously bearing fruit in us by the power of the Spirit for God and towards others.

The first text we will look at this morning is a text we looked not ago as we were going through the Paul's letter to the church in Rome. In Romans 11 the apostle addressed the conflict and prejudices that were occurring between the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians. If you remember Paul used the illustration of an olive tree to represent our relationship with all the people of God. When the tree was first planted the branches consisted entirely of ethnic Jews. As it grew, it was mostly a Jewish tree. But after the Messiah came, it became mostly a Gentile tree. Well, because of the way the tree developed, the Gentiles of Paul's day often felt superior to Jews. And so it was to the Gentiles (to us) that Paul then wrote: "*So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches (unbelieving Jews), neither will he spare you. 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*" (Romans 11:20-22).

After first speaking to us about the fate of the unbelieving Jews, the apostle Paul gets our attention by using the word "*note*" which literally means, "Look! or Behold!" Here Paul is telling us to "Look" at the stunningly and stark contrast between the "*kindness*" of God and the "*severity*" of God (the harsh decisiveness of God's punishment towards us). In other words God's Word is declaring to us: "Look and behold the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards us and the harsh decisiveness of God's punishment towards us. The harsh decisiveness of God's punishment is towards those who are not fully living out their lives for God; but the gentle character of God's heart is expressing generosity towards you, provided you continue to live out the gentle character of God's heart that has expressed generosity towards you. If not, you will experience the harsh decisiveness of God's punishment." We see the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ when we *look at* the salvation and the judgment of God, the mercy and the wrath of God, the tenderness and the toughness of God, the friendship of God and the fierceness of God.

There is no greater example of the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards us than the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul's tree illustration and the cross of Christ displays both the "*kindness*" and the "*severity*" of God: His "*kindness*", in making faith in Jesus as the only requirement, His "*severity*", in disqualifying anyone who refuses faith in Christ. God is gentle toward those who cast themselves on His mercy, and He is severe toward those who presume upon it. If we think of ourselves as belonging to the family of God based on anything other than our God-given, blood-soaked, cross-carrying, Christ-sacrificed precious gift of faith, we'll find our selves outside of the eternal family we proudly profess to be part of. "*So do not become proud, but fear*" because the *fear* of God's *severity* reveals the gentleness of God on the cross of Christ.

The fear of God's *severity* should send us running to God's *kindness* as we are awakened again to see that the preciousness of the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards us is greater than the false and deceptive hopes that we put our faith in. The fear of God's *severity* deepens the serious joy of our faith in the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards us helps keeps us from being superficial and trivial. The fear of God's *severity* opens the eyes of our hearts to see the depth of the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards us, in that we have been painfully and undeservedly chosen and called and saved by God through the crucified and risen Christ to be grafted into the eternal family tree of God forever and ever and ever. The gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards us should saturate us with profound humility in that the origin of our faith is a gift from God and the nature of our faith in Jesus leaves no room for boasting in ourselves, but shifts all the weight of boasting over onto God who through Jesus has given us the grace of the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity rather than severity towards us.

In Ephesians 2:1-7 the Paul speaks of the day when the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards us will be seen by all creation: *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness (the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity) toward us in Christ Jesus."*

God's *"kindness"* is the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards us through the sacrificial love of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ towards sinners who deserve the harsh decisiveness of God 's punishment. The fruit of the Spirit of *"kindness"* is the living out the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards us in the sacrificial love of God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ towards sinners who deserve the harsh decisiveness of God 's punishment. The fruit if the Spirit of *"kindness"* is not about being nice to others, because niceness is foundationally built on pleasing people rather than pleasing God. The fruit if the Spirit of *"kindness"* is not about *"goodness"* either because *"goodness"* is foundationally built on what people see us doing rather than who we are in Christ. *"Kindness"* is about the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity *towards others* just as the gentle character of God's heart has been expressing generosity *towards us*.

As we close we need to remember that the *"fruit of the Spirit"* Paul lists in Galatians 5 has to do with *humble character* that produces the *fruit of unity and service*. What does humble character that produces fruit of unity and service in *"kindness"* look like in our lives and in our church? Again, as I have been in the habit doing, I am going to let God's Word speak to us about this.

I will begin today by reading selected verses from 2 Corinthians 1-6 where Paul speaks out of the gentle character of his own heart for God that had been generously transformed by Jesus.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. 2 Cor 1:3-6

Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? 2 Cor 2:14-17

Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Cor 3:5-6

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Cor 3:17-18

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. . . . For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus 'sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 2 Cor 4:1; 5-10

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. 2 Cor 4:16-18

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 2 Cor 5:6-9

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. . . . if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Cor 5:14-16

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness (the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards others), the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. . . . our heart is wide open. . . . widen your hearts also. 2 Cor 6:2-11, 13

The Spirit of God through the Word of God transformed Ben Carson's character and heart. Ben realized that much of his anger stemmed from putting himself rather than God in the center of everything. Once he put God first, his character and his heart and his life changed. Once known for his violent temper he is now well known for his gentle character, which is the polar opposite of his main opponent. Ephesians 2:2-3 has already shown us that our three main opponents in this life are the world, the devil and our flesh: *"Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh."* The reality is, none of our three opponents possesses a gentle character of God's heart that seeks to express generosity towards us or others - *because* all three seek to promote their own agendas by trying to convince us that we are the center of everything. But, as Ben Carson found out what most of us already know, we are not the center of everything – and all that happens is that we become violent and angry when we try to be.

The reality is God is the center of everything. He is sovereign over all and He has sent a Savior into the world to save us from the world, the devil and our flesh. We see the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity towards us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ when we *look at* the salvation and the judgment of God, the mercy and the wrath of God, the tenderness and the toughness of God, the friendship of God and the fierceness of God. *"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."* In Colossians 3:12-17 God's Word tells us how we are to live out the gentle character of God's heart expressing generosity *towards others* just as the gentle character of God's heart has been expressed generosity *towards us*.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:12-17

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