

A FEW SMALL GREEN APPLES

GENTLENESS

To paraphrase a famous book title, all I ever needed to know about the fruit of the Spirit called Gentleness I've learned from my parishioners. While I could cite a large number of individual examples of this virtue so beautifully exemplified in members of congregations I've served, two specific persons stand out. Both now are with God in eternal life, thus it is safe to hold them up in print. Were they still alive they would be far too embarrassed about having their stories mentioned.

Gentle people are also very humble, and both this gentleman and the lady I have the privilege to write about were as humble as anyone you know. Their gentle natures and humility are well known to our heavenly Father, to their many friends, and now deserve to be known by the reader of these words.

At the funeral of the gentleman I refer to I took the opportunity to say of him, "He was the true Gentle-Man, the essence of a gentle, caring person." Among the many traits that prove this is one that Ewert would never have thought of as special at all. To him it was just a natural and normal courteous thing to do for others. He was retired and had the time, but that fact had little to do with it. There were four or five elderly ladies who could no longer drive to church, and in fact physically found it an effort to go to church at all yet theirs had

been a life of faithful and devoted church attendance. The effort to continue to worship and share in parish life was important to them. This man knew how significant such a matter was, and without any of them specifically asking him to do so, he quietly and so genuinely volunteered to transport them to church, that this just became a routine.

Each Sunday Ewert would make a run (sometimes two) to pick up his widow friends and escort them into the building. Of course he was the kind of gentleman who would open the car doors for them, as well as the outer church doors. **He** had been raised in this parish church by his English immigrant parents and was a faithful, active member all of his life. And if any of these ladies needed transportation during the week, for instance for a doctor's appointment, he made himself available. His wife approved and encouraged him, and after lovingly joked with him about his "little church harem." I can still see the smiles on their faces when they shared this humor.

The gentle nature also showed itself, and the truly spiritual quality of this virtue, when it came to parish life, especially parish politics. Ewert was a dependable leader in the church, serving on the vestry (our church board) several times. Church congregations have the same problems, fights and ups-and-downs that every human institution and all families have. Just before my coming as pastor there had been a particularly difficult period which had cost two clergy their jobs

The problems had divided the parish into factions, and the divisions and unhappiness had carried right into the beginning of my tenure. This man was a member of the vestry and therefore had been in the middle of it all. What made him so unique and different from others is that he would not get involved in any of the wrangling or disagreements.

He remained firmly loyal to the idea that the church was a family and members had to forgive and forget and move on. He absolutely refused to take any sides, or particularly to speak ill of any person, clergy or lay. In fact his calmness and gentle affirming way were important in helping the healing of this conflict. The firmly gentle leadership eventually made his leadership the leaven in a vestry that was revitalized.

He was consistently this smiling and caring kind of person. When a street person wandered into the church Ewert would give a handout with words of encouragement and a smile. If an altar boy made a mistake and got teased for it, there he would be with a pat on the shoulder and again encouragement. He always had a word of praise for the choir, something insightful about the sermon, and thanks for the altar guild and ushers (for whom he was captain). Even when Alzheimer's disease finally robbed him of the ability to say my name, he would still call me "that nice young man". He was the nice one!

The lady in our congregation who also personified this fruit of Gentleness made her impression on us in the first

minutes of our arrival in this city. I mean that literally. She and her husband were waiting in their car out in front of our rectory for the tandem arrival of our car and the moving van. She had intuited (we never told her, didn't even know her) that the 13, 11 and 8 year old children of the new rector's family might be having some difficulty in making a move to a new city. So she planned and enlisted her husband in this scheme to take the children off of our hands on moving day and show them around. She was right, and especially about our oldest. They took the children on a drive to a local museum of firearms on the Arsenal facility and for lunch at a famous local ice cream-pizza parlor. The kids had a ball and a more favorable view of the city. Meanwhile; my wife and I had peace and quiet in the chaos of arranging furniture and unpacking dishes in our new home. And this was just the beginning of a wonderful relationship between our children and this lady and her husband.

Dorothy learned that both mine and my wife's parents were no longer living. She had wonderful and; attentive grandchildren, but they weren't living near. So again she conspired with her husband. From the first they arranged birthday dinners for each of our children, always at a very nice restaurant, and this became a regular custom through their high school years. They remembered them with good keepsake Christmas presents and at graduations. And of course took special pains to speak with them at church functions. In other words without any intrusion or fuss simply became

surrogate grandparents for our "grandparentless" children, in a most gentle, caring way. It will come as no surprise that both of our sons were pall bearers with her natural grandsons at her funeral.

This was also second nature to this gentle lady in other ways. When the ladies of the women's guild she belonged to resurrected a project of putting on an annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Luncheon, she added a special touch. At her own expense she had small cards printed up thanking people for attending, and purchased foiled wrapped mints. A card and mint were then given to each person who patronized the luncheon. She continued doing this until her death at 90. Whenever any friend or parishioner had either good or ill fortune, they could count on a gracious handwritten note from Dorothy. With all of the visits I made to Dorothy after she was confined to her home, I was the one who felt uplifted and ministered to when I left. Her gentleness rubbed off on me as it had done for so many other people.

The Rev. Cn. Laurence Larson



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