

The need for stricter gun laws feels more urgent than ever after the terrorizing tragedies in Buffalo, New York, Laguna Woods, California, and Uvalde, Texas. Yet, the seduction of guns, their ability to make us feel empowered, and an industry whose profits depend on us believing we have no other choice but to protect and defend ourselves with guns has an idolatrous hold on us Americans.

In our lectionary text from Galatians, Paul writes about the nature of Christian liberty. In Christ, we are not freed *from* responsibility, not freed to do whatever we want, or freed to indulge in self-centered desires of the flesh. Rather, in Christ, we are freed *for* love, freed to care for, respect and cherish all lives. The cross is the symbol of this Christian freedom. Jesus did not pick up a weapon to defend himself from the violent Romans. He went to the cross. In his life, death and resurrection, the transformative power of God's love for humankind is made known. Nothing can separate us from this love.

In the terrifying world in which we live, where parents worry about their kids' safety at school, where a mob can infiltrate our Capitol threatening to hang our vice president, where Black, Asian and Jewish Americans are stalked and gunned down in their grocery stores, neighborhoods and places of worship, I can understand and empathize with the argument that drastic times call for drastic measures, that we must protect ourselves and our loved ones, that violence can only be stopped by violence, that Paul's fruits of the Spirit aren't much help when a terrorist with an AR-15 is at large in your building. But I also recognize the trap of this escalating violence, the way fear changes us and distorts our thinking, our desperate need to be freed to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

In the chapter he contributed to [*God and Guns: The Bible Against American Gun Culture*](#) David Lincicum writes, "To use a gun to hammer a nail or squash a fly is possible, but the gun is designed to kill; it achieves its proper purpose when used to kill. We tend to trade in euphemisms, so we might say that we'd like to have a gun for safety, for peace of mind, for protection, or 'just in case.' But any serious consideration must clear-sightedly remember precisely what a gun is designed to do and the capacity it gives its user. ...[W]e desire to own a gun in order to kill instantaneously should the necessary occasion arise."

Lincicum goes on: "To navigate the world with the capacity for instantaneous lethal force is to navigate the world as a profoundly different type of self than that envisaged by Jesus and his followers."

I can understand and empathize with the mothers who learn to shoot to protect themselves and those they love. I also understand that my fear of picking up a gun is rooted in my fear of how that weapon would change me — giving me the power to kill instantaneously, to escalate conflict, to respond to violence with violence, to destroy my chance to respond in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control with a single pull of a trigger.

Let us not be deceived by the power of the gun, nor those who sell it to us. We are not freed by the power to kill instantaneously. We are freed by the power of love.

Questions for reflection:

1. What thoughts, feelings, questions or concerns arose as you read this Scripture passage?
2. What is the gun culture like in your community? What is the peacemaking culture like in your community?
3. Do a quick search for “de-escalating violence” on the internet. What strategies make sense for you or your church to learn and practice?

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### **For the Younger Children**

Last week the kids took home rainbow colored balloons to remind them that words are important, not just hot air.

Today, Elijah the Prophet was sent to help a woman and her son who were of a ‘different’ religious practice than his own. Have you ever noticed that some just don’t like others

## **Third Sunday after Pentecost — Family faith formation for June 26, 2022**

because they are not like them? It could be because of skin color, religion, neighborhood, clothes, any number of things. Dumb thing actually.

A man who was blind was with a friend who didn't like people of another color and the blind man asked, "What' the big deal?" There are only two kinds of people as far as I can tell — those who are kind and those who are not.

That's right, isn't it? If we were blind, it certainly wouldn't matter what color skin people have or what kind of clothes they wear. The concern would be about how they act.

There is a verse in the Old Testament/Hebrew Scripture that says that God doesn't see like people see. People look for outward appearance, God looks upon the heart. God doesn't care how we look! God doesn't care what group we belong to or where we go to worship! God cares only about our hearts! How is your heart? Do you love as Jesus loved? That's all that matters to God, and that should be all that matters to us.

on-liners Bill and Megan, HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

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As we grow in grace and gratitude, our ability to give love, find joy, work for peace, practice patience, show kindness, continue in faithfulness, share gentleness and find self-control increases.



NOTE: please have colored pencils and paper available for the second reading if possible.

Welcome

Invite various persons to bring a designated item and use this liturgy as a way to begin your time of learning together.

One: Come, let us gather around and see how the Spirit will nurture our faith today

All: Who is with us?

One: Christ, the light of the world.

(Place a candle on a table in your gathering place and light it.)

All: Who is with us?

One: The Love of God, who came to meet us in the world.

(Place a cross on a table in your gathering place)

All: Who is with us?

One: The Wisdom of God, who speaks through the Scriptures

(Place an open Bible on a table in your gathering place.)

All: Who is with us?

One: The Grace of God, who proclaims we are children of God

(Place a symbol of baptism – a bowl of water, a seashell – on a table in your gathering space.)

All: Who is with us?

One: Our risen Lord, who meets us at the table. (A symbol of Communion)

(Place a symbol of communion – a plate and cup, a loaf of bread and grapes – on a table in your gathering space.)

One: We are here, Holy Spirit, ready for your leading

God sightings and prayer offerings

Invite each person to share where they saw or experienced God this week. Invite each person to share something – a person, community, experience, event, etc. – for which they want to offer prayer.

Good and gracious God, we thank you for all the ways you were and are present in our lives and in the world...*[invite each person to say aloud the sighting they named earlier]*. We bring our prayers to you, prayers for...*[invite each person to say aloud the prayer need they named earlier]*. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Connecting with Scripture — Galatians 5:1, 13-25 (NRSV, CEB)

Read the Scripture aloud the first time using the New Revised Standard Version or the Common English Bible.

Give each person a piece of paper and have colored pencils (or markers/crayons) available in the center of the table. As today's text is read a second time slowly, pause after each section (between verses 15-16 then again between verses 21-22) and invite each person to choose colors to represent their response to the text. They can doodle, create abstract colors, use symbols or literal illustrations. The key is to explore the color evoked in response to the text.

Connecting through story

Watch this clip from the movie Wonder:"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYH5urNq1Ao>

- Why do you think Julian thought it was okay to make fun of Auggie?
- Deep down what was the source of Julian's actions?
- What could he have done differently and why should he?

- What do you think Julian was trying to convey to Mr. Tushman at the end of the scene and why?

Connecting with our lives

Engage in dialogue

- What is needed for a peach, lemon, apple or any other tree to grow and produce fruit? (Good soil, seeds, watering, sun, the right climate and context, pruning, tending...)
- What do you think Paul means when he says we can “bear fruit?” How are we like trees?
- What are our soil and seeds? What feeds, waters and tends to us so that we can live into the gift God has given us?
- What will our “fruit” be — or how will we live in ways that reflect God’s goodness?
- Why do you think Paul calls love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control fruits?
- How do our abilities to love, joy, peace and the other fruits of the Spirit, grow stronger?
- How can we choose to act, and respond, differently than what the world expects or values? Why should we?
- How can these fruits of the Spirit change our relationships at home, school, work, in neighborhoods and in our families?
- How can these fruits of the Spirit change us?

Teaching points that can be incorporated into your discussion

- Today’s passage from Galatians may be familiar and is where we find the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
- However, to get to the positive influence of the Holy Spirit, Paul takes us through the things we shouldn’t do. If you have children

or younger youth participating, you may want to be ready to explain some of these negative behaviors and focus on those which are more likely to connect with young lives — jealousy, anger, quarrels, envy, etc.

- The root of this list is living in a way that displeases and dishonors God.
- At the core of Paul's argument is the belief that God, through Jesus Christ, has set us free from the bondage of sin and the need to earn our way into God's good graces. What makes grace so compelling is it is God's freely given gift to us — even when we don't deserve it. With God in control of that which matters, we can live in ways that embody God's life-giving love rather than the death-dealing behaviors that tear apart community and relationships.
- It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus and enlivened on Pentecost, that sustains and empowers us each day as we intentionally choose to honor and glorify God through our lives of gratitude.
- The use of agricultural metaphors in Scripture is abundant. Paul continues that tradition with one of bearing fruit. Just as plants and trees need good soil, sunshine and rain, tending and pruning, our faith and the practices of our faith need nurturing. Our faith bears fruit – and our life of faith matures – through studying and taking Scripture seriously, worshipping and being in community with other Christians, participating in God's ongoing work in the world, and the Holy Spirit's nurturing of all this will allow deep roots to grow so that we can resist destructiveness, pettiness, and downright meanness and instead embrace that which builds up others, communities and promotes love of God and neighbor.
- As we grow in grace and gratitude, our ability to give love, find joy, work for peace, practice patience, show kindness, continue in faithfulness, share gentleness and find self-control increases. These are the outcomes of our commitment to live according to Christ's ways rather than the world's ways.

Gather paper, fabric or other materials and make a banner with symbols that represent the fruits of the Spirit to hang where your family will see it each day as a means of reminding and encouraging each person, and each other, to live into these faithful characteristics. If your family enjoys learning things through song, you may want to explore this video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-hrxEjWxkE>

Prayer

Close your time together by praying for one another, your neighbor, community, and the world.