

14th Sunday after Trinity: September 1, 2024
“What Do You Want?”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text for this morning is our Epistle lesson, Galatians 5, especially these words, ***“I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ 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.”***¹

What do you want? Really? This question is often asked in a different way by playing a theoretical game linking your desires to physical actions and tangible goods. This game gets played quite often, often starting with something like, “If you had complete freedom for one day, what would you do?” Or, “If you had an unlimited amount of money, or had to spend some ridiculous amount of money in one day, what would you do?”

This seems like the question kind of posed in this text from Galatians, but not really as you might first think. Living in a psychological age, we are prone to see everything about me all the time. We naturally read ourselves to be alone in this cosmic battle between good and evil, and like Ash Williams, we see ourselves as the only savior of the world, facing the hordes of the evil dead with nothing but our wit, our charm, and maybe, a boomstick. That is, we have words and actions upon which to rely to get exactly what we want, by force if necessary. We don’t really have to listen to the wise men, we just need to get a few of the words right, and even if we don’t, pure might and determinism will get us the rest of the way. We would never readily admit this to each other, but many actually believe they are strong enough, on their own, to battle against the temptations of Satan and his evil hordes of messages, while downplaying the importance of how we take in many of those messages.

Last week, I spoke about the togetherness, the fellowship, the communion of saints that is the body of Christ, defined and tied together through the Apostles’ teaching and lived through the corporate life of the church through the Divine Service in Word and Sacraments.

¹ Galatians 5:16–17

One of the many problems with living in a psychological age is we tend to get caught up and bogged down in a wrong, and frankly, unhelpful, view of individualism. You read this text from Galatians, and you get the wrong view that he is first talking about the war within your own heart and mind. When Paul writes of the flesh and the spirit in this text, he is not talking about the different parts of the human being. The flesh is an existence apart from Christ. The flesh is better understood as a realm of influence that challenges God and His people. The Spirit is God's Spirit, who is the only One that has the power to overcome the flesh and is the Agent who counteracts the flesh with its evil thoughts and actions. The you in this text is a plural you; more like y'all. The thrust of this text then is the Christian battles flesh from the point of view of the decisive victory that took place in Jesus Christ.

The fleshy existence and the spiritual existence are not just an individual thing. They also manifest themselves in the larger realm of society. The flesh promotes strife and division. The Spirit binds people together in unity and by the peace of God. The list of the fleshy activities would be those found in pagan symposia gatherings, or gatherings around food and entertainment. They would also be found in the context of the pagan temples and the public cultic activities of civil life in the public square. In contrast to this, the fruits of the Spirit, the peace of God, expresses itself in the communal gatherings of believers.

So, what do you want? As a individual? As the communion of saints? As a community? What do you want? This is not a bad question. Want, or the word from the text—desire, is not inherently evil. Desire itself is neutral. It can be satisfied by evil things, or by good things of God, but desire itself is not bad. It is important to start there, because then can we see how desires have been corrupted by sin, and how communities, fellowships, gatherings, can either help or hurt; they can either satisfy our desire away from God and be our own man, or how they are satisfied in God, made content in His gifts, by His own design.

This sets up the rest of the text. The Holy Spirit enumerates both actions, the fruits, of each community; how they seek to satisfy or gratify, really, satiate these desires. The works of the flesh, the works of the body of people who stand apart from Christ, are evident.

Paul's first three make this clear: sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality. Those outside of Christ seek to satisfy through their own bodies by use of the body. The body is a weapon, or a canvas, or *my* own temple. All is aimed at using, changing, redefining, the body in ways that seek my individual, psychological happiness and worldly management. The body gets used and redefined in terms of biological reality, which undermines and redefines family and marriage and children and everything that then stems from these realities.

These powers that seeks to assert themselves over and through humanity, are not the only problems, of course. Idolatry and sorcery, are sins against God, and ways that the flesh seeks to assert its own perceptions of power over both the visible and invisible realms. Idolatry is easy enough to define in a general way. Wherever one fears, loves, or trusts in anything –whether it be a person, place, thing, or idea, action, or anything else in all creation – more than God, it's idolatry.

Sorcery is bit more challenging. Even though wizardry and witchcraft have become more mainstream in popular culture, there is more than just the overt, often first thought of the word. The word itself includes things like poison or medicine. Sorcerers are called poisonous for this reason. Here includes magicians, wizards, enchanters, and any others who by means of compacts with devils, deceive their neighbors, harm them, or steal from them. How many hurts, pains, deception, and theft come from poison of alcohol and drugs. To drink is ok, but drunkenness, the point that changes the state of one's mind, is a very dangerous serving of the flesh. How easy has it become to worship or see medication as a god. It can be good and useful, but that is not all there is. How high has the view of medicine become so that it is seen not only as helpful, but the only thing that is helpful?

These works of the flesh, these works apart from Christ, through a redefined view of the body, set up against God, manifest themselves in many ways that divide social and relational ties, destroying society and relationships by seeking chaos and discord. These works of the flesh alone bear bad fruit. It causes enmity, that is grudges and secret hatred against one another. There is strife, controversy and quarreling, jealousy and anger. This is easily seen by taking delight in someone else being upset, so you pick and pick and pick just to irritate and provoke. So when they lose it and fly off the handle, you can say, "What do you want? Did you see how mad they are? I must be right, or they wouldn't be so defensive."

These works divide and seek sides. Are you with me or against me? Who are you going to believe? Are you a republican or a democrat, and be careful how you answer, because I might not talk to you then. Which god do you serve? In all of these works of the flesh, the goal is the same, “What do I want? How can I better be served?”

This is not the desire of Christ or His body. Jesus was tempted to do all of these works and live in a different community. I suppose one could play the game with Him, “Jesus, what if you could do whatever you wanted? You are God. You have unlimited knowledge and power. You have complete freedom to do whatever you want? What would you do?”

He shows us exactly what it is that He wants? He wants you! He shows this very clearly to you. What did He do? He was tempted to serve Himself and live in a different community. He was tested to fear the world, love its enticements, and trust in its promises of perceived freedom and glory. But He walked a different way. He remained true to only One God. He feared the Lord, loved His Heavenly Father, and trusted in His Holy Word above all things. He loved you with such a love that He was willing to be betrayed into the hands of sinners and crucified on the cross. Instead of humanly wisdom and fleshly desires, His flesh was beaten and nailed to the cross and put on full display in all worldly shame, no secrets left of His humanity for the world to see. The desires of the flesh – immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness and things like these meted their division—and Christ drank them all for all humanity. He took them upon Himself and drank them to the very last drop, as the full cup of God’s wrath against sin was drunk to the dregs.

Jesus Christ destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light. On the third day, He was raised and He now lives forevermore. He who lives and reigns to all eternity, has all authority in heaven and on earth, and what does He do with it? He gives it to His Church. He commissions His apostles to make disciples by baptizing, teaching all things that He has commanded. It is not just a few words, but the fullness of God Himself is contained through Baptism, through Holy Absolution, through His Holy Supper.

It is not by our works or words, but by His that the evil dead is destroyed and heaven is given to you. Forgiveness of sins and eternal life are yours. His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is given to you, through these very means of Word and Sacraments, so that you have no doubt to whom you belong and to what community, what body, you are a part.

The body of Christ, of which you are a part, lives a different life, enjoying and producing different fruit:

Love – this is not a hidden quality. This is a verb. This is not a self-satisfying or a purely emotional character; it is an action word. You live in love, true Bible proclaiming, Law and Gospel declaration, love. It is love that speaks THE one and only truth: God's Word. It is a love that seeks the welfare of the neighbor. It is a love that calls sinners to repentance. It is a love that uses God's name, clings to His Word, cherishes all those whom God has put in authority, protects all human life, honors the marriage bed, protects possessions, and puts the best construction on everything. It is by these works, everyone can see with great certainty, that you are different; that you have the love of Christ.

In Christ, you have joy. This is not simply the emotion of happiness. Happiness is fleeting, joy is everlasting. Joy allows you rejoice in the Lord always. You are glad because of His divine mercy, and even in the midst of the world's storms, you praise and bless the Lord. Joy allows you not to be envious of your neighbor's goods; rather, you wish you neighbor joy in them as though they were your own. Joy allows you to praise the gifts of God given to your neighbor, as well as your own.

Peace – this is a gift given by total reliance on the mercy of Christ. There are many times when it passes all understanding; such as when God hides himself and you are tested. In trial and times of testing, peace is seemed to be removed, and where do you turn? The Christian is constantly reminded of and given one peace, peace that comes from above. That is the beauty of the Word and Sacraments.

Following along with these fruits are patience, or long-suffering. That is you suffer at the hands of the wicked, and you look forward to their improvement. You desire their repentance, and unity in the body of Christ under the word of God.

There is kindness and goodness. The Spirit causes the Christian to be cordial, kind, friendly, able to listen to others, and to speak kindly towards them.

The Spirit bears in the Christian faith, which means we believe in God's promises. It also means that towards our neighbors we keep our promises. A Christian is faithful to their word. Yes means yes, and no means no.

The Christian is also gentle and has self-control. That means you are not provoked to anger, and you do not take vengeance. "***Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.***"² That is not your calling. You teach, exhort, and love like a brother or sister. You have control of your words and your body. You cannot control your neighbor. You cannot control how they act, but you can control how you act and respond.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, what do you want? As the body of Christ, we want what He wants. We want to love God with our whole heart, body, mind and strength AND to love our neighbors as ourselves. We want to bear one another's burdens in love and walk by the Spirit. As the Church lives in this age, as you live in these times awaiting the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in all His glory, you live in your vocations, doing the work God has given you each day with a new desire and love for it. You live and work from the decisive vantage point of the victory that took place on the cross.

If you had complete freedom, what you do? What do you want?

Spirit of life, of love and peace,
Unite our hearts, our joy increase,
Thy gracious help supply.
To each of us the blessing give
In Christian fellowship to live,
In joyful hope to die."³ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

² Romans 12:19

³ May We Thy Precepts, Lord, Fulfill LSB 698:3

**Prayer of the Church
Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity
1 September 2024**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty and gracious God, You want all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Magnify the power of the Gospel in the hearts of Your faithful people that Your Church may spread the good news of salvation. Protect, encourage, and bless all who proclaim the saving cross that Christ, being lifted up, may draw all people to Himself. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of hosts, You have prepared the Church of Christ to be a lovely court in the midst of a troubled world. Form our hearts to long for the place where Your glory dwells, that we may find healing and peace at His feet. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, grant Your protection upon our land and people. Deliver us from violence and discord. Grant safety to all who work to bring peace to our land, including those in law enforcement and members of the armed forces. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Stephanie, Dan, and Tamera*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of comfort, heal the sick, hospitalized and recovering, *Dick, Gavin, Esther, Ruth, Ann, William, Zoey, Jeri, Pastor Small, Debbie, those we name in our hearts*. Strengthen them to endure their afflictions with courage and hope. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Good Lord, Your Son instituted the salutary gift of the Lord's Supper. Send Your blessing upon all who receive the body and blood of Jesus for their forgiveness. Grant thankful hearts that praise Your name to all who receive the Sacrament this day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else You know that we need O Father, grant for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**