

Have been thinking of Fruits of the Spirit as listed by Paul
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and
self-control.

Looked at Love, joy, patience as we find them in Scripture, as we find them in
God – attributes we should expect to see in ourselves as we seek to follow God.

Looked at them in the context of this painting by Rembrandt

How about gentleness and self control – how are we on those – how can we
encourage in others those gifts we find so hard ourselves?

Christian life is not always easy

God's love was a 'Calvary love' – love that involved pain, sacrifice,
misunderstanding – Christian life, Christian discipleship has that Calvary
element to it.

Dietrich Boenhoffer used to talk of 'cheap grace'

Paul talks of the old self having been crucified with Christ

Crucifixion ugly and brutal, long and painful – once victim secured to the cross
the final outcome in no doubt.

So there are times when Christian pilgrimage not easy, times when I fail, when the old self reasserts itself. Times of isolation, of misunderstanding.

Christ will not leave me, the end of my pilgrimage is secure.

These are fruits of the Spirit – not of my own self discipline or effort

Does not depend on me.

Gentleness and self control do not automatically well up within me, cannot be induced by my discipline – only come to the extent I am prepared to allow God's Holy Spirit to live and work in and through me

Holy Spirit inspires all that is good in mankind – enables me to become more like Jesus..

Philippians 2

Fruits of the Spirit characteristics of those who have grasped the reality of God's love in Christ – an inner conversion of heart and soul not the grudging payments of a deal.

Lives changed by the totally gracious love of God in Christ – our lives, in all their imperfection, bear witness to Christ living in us.

Gentleness of Christ manifested in humility – emptied himself, taking the form of a servant

One of barriers to gentleness is our pride, our dignity – hard to be proud and to be gentle – model of the father's reaction to the returning prodigal.

Gentleness, not pride, a fruit of the spirit

Gentleness of Christ shown in obedience, even death on a cross

Another barrier to gentleness is our own wilfulness – what I want, what I think

Have to discover the lesson of Gethsemane 'Not my will but yours be done'

Next week is Holy Week – drawn into a deeper understanding of God's love for us in Christ