

According to the website Holidays Calendar.com, “National Kissing Day, also known as World Kissing Day and International Kissing Day, is a nonofficial holiday that is celebrated on July 6th every year. It is a holiday in which people are encouraged to pucker up and kiss the person they love.” Apparently, the website lists all kinds of special occasions that most people do not celebrate, but probably would like to.

A week from this Wednesday, two days after lighting up the barbie and eating our hamburgers, hot dogs and apple pie, we’re encouraged to set off a few fireworks of our own on a personal level and kiss someone we love. Advocates for the holiday are quick to point out the benefits of kissing: Kissing burns 6 calories a minute so if you kiss for two hours, you can afford to eat that piece of chocolate. Kissing also increases saliva production, which can lead to a healthier mouth. It can build up immunity because of the interaction with the bacteria of the mouth, it can relieve stress, and kissing can even ease allergy symptoms.

Although kissing can be found in the Bible, apparently no one seems to agree as to why people kiss, or how the whole kissing thing got started. Some say that we kiss because it feels good, and that it feels good because our lips and tongues are covered in nerve endings. When two pairs of lips meet, sparks fly. We like to kiss! If you don’t believe me, think about all of the movies and television shows that pulled at your heartstrings when two love birds were finally able to share their very first kiss!

Ok so why all of this talk about kissing, and how is it relevant for today’s message? It’s relevant because the Bible, especially the New Testament, has a lot to say about interpersonal relationships. And today’s second lesson, featuring a Pauline epistle, is a well-known text admonishing us to practice certain behaviors. In fact, in Paul’s letter this morning perhaps it might help if we call the behaviors he mentions metaphorical kisses. In other words, they are actions that make us, and

others, feel good. They are actions that also, in a very definite way, “feed” and nurture us in our growth as persons and as followers of Christ.

The behaviors Paul itemizes on his list, in his letter to the Galatians, are popularly known as the “fruit of the Spirit,” and are instrumental in bonding people to one another. He even uses the metaphor of fruit to characterize nine virtuous qualities, and although it is a good metaphor, it may be an overused one. We hear it, but we don’t hear it. And yet, perhaps if we say kisses of the Holy Spirit, rather than fruit of the Spirit,”— well, more than likely people are going to pay attention.’ That being the case, let’s look at a few of the behaviors, or kisses, that Paul mentions one at a time and consider how we might express the love of God to others this coming week!

First, we should talk about the **kiss of joy** ... in which we brighten up a room with our cheerful attitudes. When we partake of this kiss, we often make others glad just to be around us, and our cherry attitude gives hope to others. After all, our lives should be filled with words of encouragement and positivity, and forward-looking thinking. Consider the following definition of joy found in the dictionary: Joy is defined as “an emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying; keen pleasure; elation.”

Joy is an attribute of Christian living that unfortunately can’t be sustained all the time. Joy is the spike, the rush, the sudden flood of ecstasy, the jumping and squealing with delight so keen it’s almost painful. That’s joy! Then it subsides into a state of wellbeing we call happiness. Most people can be induced to experience spikes of joy; you get a raise or promotion, you win \$50 in a lotto scratcher, you find out you sister’s having a baby or that the Mariners scored a winning run at the bottom of the 9th inning to win the game. Anyone can have the spikes of happiness we call joy.

Christian joy, however, differs from the joy I just mentioned. A Christian can experience a happiness spike for many more reasons. Christians experience a rush of joy when sinners repent, when an alcoholic celebrates a year of sobriety, when given an opportunity to serve someone in need, when someone has an astounding success, and when we are given the opportunity to pray for others and when we witness those prayers answered. When we experience this kind of joy, it's usually from God, and it looks a lot like what Jesus was referring to when he said to his disciples, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

The next kiss we should learn about is the **kiss of peace**. When we are portraying that kind of behavior we are usually welcoming and embracing of others, and we generally employ gestures that identify us as people of goodwill. Others see us as a calming presence whose inner life is utterly without conflict. This attribute of the Holy Spirit speaks to one's inner satisfaction, contentment, and serenity. And like joy, peace is a quality that Jesus expressly gave his disciples. He didn't say, "My patience I give you." He said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

That is huge! Why? Because peace is often difficult for us to find; with social media and its shouting and shrieking at us, not to mention the fact that we live in a world of litigation and agitation, and in a culture of complaining and confrontation. These days it's often quite difficult for us to experience "inner satisfaction, contentment, and serenity." Thankfully, however, the peace that our savior offers us comes to us from God by the Holy Spirit. So, when we're living in the Spirit, and not in what the apostle Paul calls "the flesh," we are blessed with qualities, we never thought possible we could possess, that we can also share with others

The next kiss we should discuss is the **kiss of faithfulness**, and it is a gesture that indicates our love and commitment so that others might know that they can depend on us to do the right thing. A faithful person is “full of faith,” that is, they are absolutely brimming with confidence in the faithfulness of God. Perhaps they are like Abraham, who according to Paul in his letter to the Romans, “hoping against hope, ... believed.” “He did not weaken in faith ...”

A person demonstrating this quality contrasts easily with the wavering and doubtful person, who doesn't know his or her own mind. The doubtful person lives with hesitation and fear, wondering what will happen next, waiting for the other shoe to drop. In contrast to this, our faithfulness is a virtue that blesses others. When we are faithful, others often discover that they can lean on, and depend upon us. To have a faithful friend is one of the rarest things. And we can and should try our best to be that person to the people around us!

The second to last kiss we should learn about is the **kiss of self-control**, in which one offers restraint and self-discipline, and in doing is identified as a person who is dependable and trustworthy. This person is seldom out of control, and is always the master of his or her emotions. When others are falling apart at the seams, someone with self-control is considered a harbor in the tempest, a rock, and a refuge. A person who behaves in this way typically doesn't need be right all the time, doesn't always have to have the last word, and doesn't always need to have what their heart desires at that very moment. People like that know how to wait; they know how to control their tongue and offer measured responses, they also know how to manage their emotions, set boundaries, and establish goals and objectives.

And last, but certainly not least, we have **the kiss of love** ... Paul lists this first in his letter, but perhaps it's best to discuss it last, because love is the kiss that covers and includes all other affectionate gestures. In fact, it is pretty safe to

assume that if you are impatient, joyless, faithless, and undisciplined; you probably don't have much love in your life. How could love coexist with such negative and undesirable qualities?

It's no accident that we equate God's unconditional love, with the love necessary to make a marriage work. Although the apostle Paul did not think he was writing about marriage when he penned the words that have become known as the "Love Chapter" in the Bible — 1 Corinthians 13 — it has become precisely that. We know intuitively that agape love, unconditional love, is the crowning virtue of all, as Paul himself declared: "And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." In other words, love is an all-encompassing virtue.

An English priest and Theologian named John Stott once wrote that "the mere recital of these Christian graces should be enough to make the mouth water and the heart beat faster. For this is a portrait of Jesus Christ." To the extent that we can express the virtues of Christ — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control — we also express the passion of Christ, the very essence of who Christ is.

National Kissing Day! It's coming up in just ten days! So get out the lip balm and the breath freshener, and prepare to pucker up. Better yet, as we head toward our Independence Day celebrations, and as we meet with our friends, families, and neighbors, let's renew our interest in expressing the love of Christ by living out his passion and exuberance by practicing the kisses of the Spirit that Paul shares with us in our lesson this morning. So, let's get ready to do some smooching with the help of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God! Amen!