

Sermon for Zion Presbyterian Church – June 09, 2019 - Pentecost
Hymns: No, Not By Might; Lead Me Lord; May We, O Holy Spirit;
Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God
Scripture: Galatians 5:16-25 NLT
Sermon Title: The Fruit of the Spirit (Series Summary)

Galatians 5:16-25 NLT

Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.

Today is Pentecost Sunday, when the church remembers that first Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the gathered believers in breathtaking power. Jesus had promised this (Acts 1:4-5): “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” And when the Holy Spirit came, it was an unmistakable moment (Acts 2:1-4):

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

There were people from around the Mediterranean world visiting Jerusalem at the time, and all heard the believers, praising God in their various languages – a wonderful vision of how the Gospel would be spread throughout the world, to all people, in all

places. And one of those places, some 20 years later, was Galatia – a province in the area of what is now central Turkey. Paul and Silas had travelled through there, and established communities of faith. The Biblical book we call “Galatians” is a letter written by Paul to strengthen the believers there.

By this time, the work of the Holy Spirit had been evidenced in different, less dramatic ways than the Day of Pentecost, but in ways no less important to the life of the believer – to you and to me. The evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, says Paul, isn’t with tongues of fire or with a sudden inexplicable facility with foreign languages. It is with fruit. Spiritual fruit.

The “Fruit of the Spirit,” as Paul calls them, are the natural outgrowth of a life lived with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. As we grow in Christ – as we grow closer in relationship with God through worship, study and service – the Holy Spirit, the presence and power of God within us, becomes more and more who we are; we begin to resemble, to inhabit, to express the characteristics of Jesus – characteristics we call the Fruit of the Spirit.

...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Now “fruit” is an interesting way to talk about the work of the Spirit, and to help us understand why, I’ve brought along a bowl of fruit this morning.

The first thing you might notice is that there are all kinds of different fruit here in the bowl. I happened to have purchased nine different kinds, insofar as there are nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit in our passage this morning, but I could have purchased many more, even as there are many other aspects of the work of God’s Spirit within us. This morning, we’ll stick with nine, but the point is, there is a great variety.

The next thing to notice is that it looks beautiful. We humans are programmed to look at fruit and recognise it as something wonderful and good. There are some kinds of fruit that require a bit of investigation before they reveal their beauty (like a kiwi for instance), but the ones we see here are all somewhat universally recognised as a good thing. Just like the fruits of the Spirit; you don’t need much persuading that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are things worth having. They are universally recognised as a good thing.

Another thing about fruit is that it is good for you. Fruit is packed full of the kinds of stuff our bodies need to be healthy and strong; in fact, without the vitamins and other such goodies found in fruit (I hope I’m not being too technical here), we are subject to innumerable diseases, such as scurvy, a blight upon the seafaring world until it was discovered that fruit, especially citrus, could magically prevent this wasting disease. A

person without fruit is not a well person. Similarly, a person without love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control is not a well person.

Fourthly, fruit is delicious. It brings pleasure to us. It makes our life more rich and full. It is like a wonderful gift when our long winter is over and we can get fresh fruit right from the field – a beautiful bowl of strawberries or a crunchy McIntosh right off the tree or those unbelievable peaches from Niagara. It is hard to be depressed when eating a wonderful fresh fuzzy Niagara peach. Fruit improves the quality of our lives. In the same way, the fruit of the Spirit immeasurably enriches our lives.

This brings up the idea of ripeness. Fruit, when it isn't ripe, isn't really very good at all. You get one of those early peaches, and you're all excited, and you wash it under the tap and the little beads of water are glistening on the fuzz, and it looks fantastic, and you bite into it, and it is like biting into a ball of Styrofoam. Or you get suckered into buying a box of enormous California strawberries and they taste like your foot's asleep.

Unfortunately, I think many of us are walking around like baskets of unripe fruit. We have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, but it is of uneven quality, it isn't ripe, it isn't ready.

We have love, but it is afraid of getting hurt, and we hide it away.

We have joy, but we look like we've been sucking a lemon.

We have peace, but we drown it with endless images of violence we call entertainment, we have peace but we bury it with pointless anxieties.

We have patience, but not for the dreamer driving in front of us, 10 KPH below the speed limit, texting while they drive, and we're trying to catch the ferry, and if we had a rocket launcher mounted on the front of our car, we'd press the button on this guy, but quick.

We have generosity, but largely only when it comes to ourselves; when it comes to the needs of others, well, hey, I worked for my money, let them work for theirs.

We have faithfulness, unless there's something good on TV, or the playoffs are on during a church event.

We have gentleness, unless we're in a hurry, or unless we're stressed, or unless the other person isn't seeing things my way, or unless it's late, or we had a hard day at work, or, or, or.

We have self control, unless we want to buy just that one more little thing, after all, the credit card is full anyway, one little purchase more won't make a difference, or perhaps what's one donut more or less in the world, or perhaps just one more glass will be fine, I'm all right to drive, or, or, or.

Yes, we have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, but it is of uneven quality, it isn't ripe, it isn't ready.

Unripe fruit is one problem. Over-ripe fruit is another. Who wants to share this lovely black banana? Dana saves these things – puts them in the freezer – for making banana bread. But eating one right out of the skin like this is an exercise in gag control. It reminds me of those National Geographic episodes where the happy native Amazonian tribesman finds some huge larvae of some unspeakable bug and peels it open and slurps the wiggly thing down.

How does fruit get over-ripe? Nobody uses it! If you don't use it, it isn't any good! Some things get better with age, and fruit is one of them, but if you leave it too long without using it, it is no good to anyone. In the same way, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are only good when they are used; if you try to hoard the Fruit of the Spirit, and not share it, it just goes bad.

The final thing I want to say about fruit is that while there is fruit that you can find growing wild and just hanging on the tree or the vine, the majority of fruit we enjoy today is the result of a lot of hard work and careful development. Any fruit farmer can tell you that an apple tree that is left to grow wild won't give very many apples, and the ones it gives will be immature and not much worth eating. The same is true with peach trees, pear trees, and the like. Any vintner can tell you that grape vines need extensive pruning if the bunches are going to have any hope of ripening into the kind of grapes that make such wonderful wine. And if you want the Fruit of the Spirit to mature in your life, you have to expect the same kind of hard work to bring it to maturity. And oftentimes, just as with an apple tree or grape vine, the pruning might not seem like such a good thing at the time. But if we want to resemble Jesus by exhibiting the characteristics of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, well, we're going to need some pruning. Jesus put it this way:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts away every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit. But he trims every branch that does produce fruit, so that it will produce even more fruit. Stay joined to me, and I will stay joined to you. Just as a branch cannot produce fruit unless it stays joined to the vine, you cannot produce fruit unless you stay joined to me.” (John 15:1-8)

God is the gardener of our lives, giving us the gift of life, providing all we need, overseeing all we do. Jesus is the vine, the rootstock to which, by faith in him, we are grafted; through whom we have a new identity, a new purpose; in whom we grow. The Holy Spirit is like the sap flowing from God, through Christ, into us, giving us strength to grow and thrive, until we bear the fruit we were created and in faith cultivated to produce, as day by day we grow to resemble the Vine; until, day by day, we resemble Christ, whose life was one of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Rick Warren explains the pruning process like this:

If God is going to make you like Jesus Christ, then He's going to take you through everything Jesus went through.

- *Was there anytime when Jesus was lonely? Yes.*
- *Was there anytime when Jesus was tempted? Yes.*
- *Was there anytime when Jesus was unpopular? Yes.*
- *Misunderstood? Yes.*
- *Criticized? Yes.*
- *Went without basic needs? Yes.*
- *Was there ever a time in Jesus' life when things did not make his life comfortable? Absolutely.*

Why do you think God would spare you those things? If He's going to make you like Christ, He's going to take you through everything Jesus went through. God produces the fruit of the Spirit in your life by putting you in the exact opposite situation.

If God wants to teach you real love, does He put you around a bunch of lovely people just like you? No, if God wants to teach you real love, He's going to put you around some unlovely people. It's easy to love people like you. You like yourself.

How does God teach you peace? You're sitting at home when everything's perfect and the kids are quiet, and you're making a lot of money? No. He puts you in a traffic jam. Peace is learned in chaos, in a crisis.

How about patience? God puts you in lines. Ever been to the Department of Motor Vehicles? That's the number one way God makes you more patient.

C.S. Lewis summed it up best, when he said, *"The prayer that God will make you more comfortable, or more happy, or more wealthy, is the prayer of an immature Christian. The prayer, however, that God would make you better, it the first step toward maturity. It is the knowledge that pruning is required."*

Each of us needs some pruning in our lives if we are going to exhibit and experience the Fruit of the Spirit at perfect ripeness: a love that loves the unlovely, a joy in the face of sorrow, peace in the midst of chaos, patience when things don't go our way, kindness when it is easier to just walk away, generosity to another in the face of

our own endless needs, faithfulness when it is not convenient, gentleness when our first thought is anger, and self-control when all around us people are losing theirs. If this is the kind of fruit for which our life is known, then it will be a life worth living indeed, and a blessing to all with whom we share our lives.

That's a Day of Pentecost I would like to see, right here; A church that evidences these things in all of its people, a church in which the Fruit of the Spirit is in dazzling abundance would indeed draw an amazed and incredulous crowd, and would be the unmistakable sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and a church which was ready to change the world. Don't you want that for yourself? Don't you want that for Zion?

When the disciples experienced the Holy Spirit, they were gathered in prayer. They came together in worship. We, too, individually and as a church, can pray, should pray, must pray, for the Holy Spirit to be made more evident in our lives. Ask God to do that for you, for your church.

When Jesus talked about the work of God the Master Gardener, he talked about pruning away that which is unhelpful, which draws strength and nourishment away from the good fruit. What is there in your life that undermines your love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? What needs to be pruned? Do you have the strength to do it? Pray that God would give you insight and courage to do the work that needs to be done.

Finally, when the Apostle Paul wrote about the Fruit of the Spirit, he advised us to, *"Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives... Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives."* Start each day with a prayer that God would lead you, guide you, direct you in the way you should go. And how do we know we're on the right path? Again and again, the Bible says (Psalm 119:105), *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* Regular Bible reading will help to light your way forward.

Coming together in prayer and worship. Taking a hard look at our lives, and pruning away those things which are choking the Spirit within us. Becoming more and more familiar with the Word of God, with the Life of Jesus, through the Scriptures. This is how we, together, will cultivate the Fruit of the Spirit in us, and through us, and together, do the wonderful work God has in store.

Come, Holy Spirit! Amen.