

Fruit of the Spirit: Meaning in the Metaphor

June 2nd

Scripture: Galatians 5:16-25

Let me just say to begin with that reading those two lists is rather heavy stuff. Who can get rid of all the bad stuff? Who can live out all the good stuff? Clearly if this is left up to us, “impossible, incapable, improbable, unlikely” are words that come to mind. It makes me think back to the good old days when I was a young believer and would read about the wife of noble character described in Proverbs 31. She was a marvel and I thought to be a good wife I had to emulate her: sew my kids clothes, get up at the crack of dawn to make meals, keep my house in perfect order and then run a business on the side so that in the end I might get my children to rise up and call me blessed!! None of that was working for me!! I have since been dissuaded from using that as a guide for life. Here is the good news: This series on the Fruit of the Holy Spirit is not an opportunity for discouragement or guilt, but for hope - It's not what you or I have developed on our own, but hope for what God intends to grow in us. We cooperate with God's plan and the Spirit's indwelling power to do in us what we cannot on our own produce - good fruit that carries the seed of life to those around us.

We start the series by reminding ourselves that this is a metaphor from Scripture comparing what God does within us through His Holy Spirit to something in nature that is familiar to us. Metaphors are wonderful in that they help us understand spiritual truths that may be difficult for us to grasp. But we also note that metaphors can be stretched beyond their meaning. So we are careful as we unpack this metaphor. Here are the main ideas that we will consider this morning:

- Fruit is an inside job.
- Fruit develops over time.
- Fruit isn't just for eating .
- Growing spiritual fruit is a “both and” proposition.
- The Fruit of the Spirit is part of God's plan to fill the world with the knowledge and love of His Son. He is faithful, He will do it!! And He has put the Spirit in us to do that work.

So fruit production is an inside job. The fruit of anything is the product of some thing, some action. In the natural world, we know the plant or tree does not strain, stress or try harder, or even try at all, to produce fruit. Fruit is what the plant does naturally, if it is healthy. It is in its DNA. An Apple tree produces apples because its DNA requires it. Nature tells us that the Fruit of the Spirit is not a check list to labor over, or to try harder to produce. If we have the Spirit of God within us, we have His DNA. Our spiritual DNA naturally wants to produce the fruit that comes from the Spirit's work on the inside of us, in our hearts and minds. The Spirit's work is the work of formation: God's plan for each of us is to transform us into the image of Christ (2Cor. 3:1-18) so that we reflect the life of Jesus - his thoughts, his emotions, his words, his motivations, and finally his actions. We begin to increasingly look like Him. Living in connection to our inherent spiritual DNA, means that we will be increasingly producing the outward evidence of the Spirit's work inside of us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control for starters. In John 15 Jesus describes this as being attached to the the vine and being fruitful branches. Abiding!

In the natural world **fruit takes time to develop.** There is no shortcut to sweet, well-developed fruit. From the time of pollination of the plant's flowers to the time that fruit is ripe and falls to the ground a whole season passes. The fruit develops around that maturing seed.

We are so dedicated to the immediate. Everything worthwhile we believe is painless and immediate. We press our technology to do away with wait time, valuing fast food, speed reading, fast check out lines, no-wait TSA plans, etc. Do you remember the days before high speed electron stuff. I would go into my office and turn on the computer and then wait for what now seems like hours just to have the thing connected to the internet. Now it is almost instant - if everything is working. But time is required for good, sweet fruit to develop. Armond's family used to have a wonderful Italian prune tree right by the deck. My kids loved to eat those prunes. When they were ripe they were a real treat, better than any candy. But sometimes as the prunes began to turn blue, the kids would get anxious for the treat and would "harvest" a few without asking. Arm's Mom never was disturbed by this because she knew that when they bit into one of those unripe prunes, their tongues and their tummies would warn them about fruit that wasn't ripe. Sweet fruit takes time!!

In the spiritual life much the same process is evident. We come into the kingdom of God through our recognition of Jesus as God's Son and a determination to follow Him - we've been pollinated! Then right away the nascent seed of life in us and Fruit of the Spirit begin to develop - the seed becoming larger and holding more and more potential for new life as we grow in our knowledge and love for the Lord. As the seed of life grows in us, so does the fruit grow sweeter. It just takes time for the fruit to ripen and release the seed of life. Through this process the Holy Spirit works silently through good and bad times, through forces outside the person, including sadness, sin, awards and demerits to produce fruit. In fact a healthy tree needs those times of stress as well as the seasons of sun and adequate rain to grow strong and thrive. Even through the rough patches of life, the seed of life is protected by The Spirit of God. When the seed is ripe, it's the fruit that makes it palatable and desirable. It is the fruit that enhances the chances that the seed of God's good news in Christ will find a new home. The Fruit of the Spirit in our lives makes us good transmitters of the gospel. Have you known someone who claimed to know God who was cruel, angry, belittled others and was stingy? They are not great seed planters for the Kingdom because they don't look at all like Jesus. But those who evidence the life of Jesus are compelling - they draw others to themselves and to God.

The natural world also teaches us that although fruit is wonderful, **it isn't the main thing or the only thing!!** Although God gives us every fruit of our consumption - see Genesis 1:29 - for the tree or the bush or vine, the fruit isn't the important thing...it's the seed that the plant has produced, held within the fruit. The fruit, sweet to the taste, nutritious and ripe contains the plant's seed. And when the seed is ripe and ready to bring new life, the fruit falls to the ground or is picked - the deer come to eat, the rabbits, the wild animals and birds eat and then distribute the seeds which are not digestible. We are part of that system too: when we go to the store we buy fruit, take it home, often peel it, core it, slice it up and either spit out the seeds (think watermelon) or throw them out, perhaps in the compost bin. In this way the fruit becomes one of the ways the plant reproduces itself. The plant is passing on the seed, wrapped in these beautiful, delicious fruits. When the fruit falls to the ground and rots, the seed is released to grow a new plant or tree. Jesus said that the grain of wheat (the seed) must fall to the ground and die so that the life within it can spring up into a harvest of more life. In much the same way, we, impregnated with the DNA of God who is LIFE are sent out to give what we have been given in Christ, new life - eternal life now, forgiveness of sin, peace, joy, love, and in the end of it all, life with God, the Three in One, forever in Heaven. This is the Trinity's work and the Holy Spirit is the enabler, the power source to make it happen.

Finally, This process of producing the Fruit of the Holy Spirit is **all God's work and at the same time all ours as participants**. We become co-laborers in a sense. In nature It's not our responsibility to

make fruit, but we are like the farmers who weed the soil, get rid of pests that destroy. We water and fertilize if necessary. We protect our trees and plants when we can from ice and drought.

In the spiritual life our participation is critical, We do have a part to play remembering that making fruit isn't our job. Our job is to create the conditions where the Spirit can grow the fruit. As Dallas Willard says, "Grace is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning. Effort is action. Earning is attitude." We weed out those things that keep us from following Christ, habits and attitudes that are contrary to His way; we water our lives with the Word of God so that we know his ways, we Pray to keep in step with the Spirit. Basically, we notice what God is doing in our lives, and we cultivate as partners of the Holy Spirit.

We look again at Jesus words in John 15: God's job through the Holy spirit is to produce good fruit, our job is to remain, to abide, which means to make our home in him. That's a commitment to a relationship with Jesus. He promises then that He will remain in us, that we will bear fruit, that God will hear us, and He will receive glory as the world sees that we are his disciples.

As we work our way through the fruit of the spirit this summer, my prayer for myself and for our congregation is that we each will experience more love, more joy, more peace, more patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self control through our cooperation with God's Holy Spirit's work in our lives. Remember this - you might fail and you probably will but He is faithful and He will do it. **Amen. Next week we will tackle the biggest fruit - Love!!**