

Passion Fruit
Galatians 5:16-25
June 30, 2019
Rev. Diane Christopher

Before we read let us pray: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen.

Read Galatians 5:16-26

Growing up as a Christian, I've always known about the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Before we go any further, a Sunday School teacher pointed out a way to remember them: the first three have one syllable (love, joy, peace). The next three have two syllables (patience, kindness, goodness). The last three have 3 syllables: faithfulness, gentleness, self-control). Easy!

I tell this story often in classes I teach: I always thought the fruit of the Spirit were qualities I had to strive for. I would get up in the morning, and pray something like, "Ok, I am going to be more loving today. God, make me more patient today. I am going to have self-control."

Then I get in a long line at the grocery store, and I roll my eyes or give an impatient sigh, or mutter, "Oh come on." Or, someone drives really slow in a single lane as I am stuck behind the driver and I start yelling at them while in my car. And the fruit of the Spirit that I had been striving for goes out the window.

However, over the years, I've learned that the fruit of the Spirit is not something I strive for and try to implement in myself on my own. The fruit of the Spirit is exhibited in our lives when we are dependent on the Spirit. We don't begin the day with a commitment to bear fruit. Our commitment is to walk in the Spirit.

When I had my own church in New Jersey, I lived 2 blocks from peach orchards, and not too far from cherry trees, pears, and plums. I watched as the farmers pruned the trees, tilled and fertilized the soil, watered the trees making the conditions just right to produce the best fruit possible.

The farmers do not cause the fruit to grow. Instead, they make the conditions right to give the fruit the opportunity to grow. The trees responded by producing the most delicious peaches I've ever tasted. Oh, I was in heaven every summer.

It is the same with the fruit of the Spirit. We cannot force love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control to grow within us. We are merely the bearers of that fruit. What we need to do is to make the conditions right that allow this fruit to mature in our lives. This happens when we learn to walk in the Spirit.

In the movie *Evan Almighty* (2007), God calls newly elected congressman Evan Baxter (played by Steve Carell) to build an ark in his suburban neighborhood. When Evan's wife Joan (Lauren Graham) becomes understandably confused and shaken by the odd behavior of her husband, she decides to take some time away to sort it out.

On her way out of town, she and their children stop at a restaurant where God (Morgan Freeman) serves as their waiter. When the children are away from the table, the waiter/God engages Joan in conversation. He has noticed that she is troubled and asks if she is okay. She tells him about her husband and his ark, and asks for advice.

The waiter/God offers this beautiful thought. "If someone prays for patience, do you think God gives them patience? Or does he give them the *opportunity* to be patient?"

The waiter continues, "If someone asked for their family to be closer," which is Joan's prayer throughout the movie, "do you think God zaps them with warm, fuzzy feelings? Or does he give them opportunities to love each other?"

While we would like the fruit of the Spirit to suddenly and miraculously appear in our lives, and all of a sudden we are loving and joyful and patient, it doesn't work that way. To borrow the phrasing of the movie, these fruits aren't zapped into our lives. Rather, we are given the opportunity to allow them to grow within us. And we participate in the process by worshiping, scripture reading, prayer. When we do this, we make room for God to do wonderful work within us.

For you see, the Fruit of the Spirit are characteristics of God. God has demonstrated to

us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. As we spend time with God, we experience these characteristics of God towards us.

Love: “For God so loved the world that God gave His only son.” John 3:16

Joy: “Jesus said, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11).

Peace: Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27)

Patience: The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you... 2 Peter 3:9

Kindness: so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:7

Goodness: "Taste and see that the LORD is good; Psalm 34:8

Faithfulness: If we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself. 2 Timothy 2:13

Gentleness: Jesus said, “ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Matthew 11:29

Self-Control The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, Numbers 14:18

The fruit of the Spirit are characteristics of God demonstrated towards us. As we stay connected to God, these qualities or fruit begin to develop within us. Sort of like couples that begin to become more like each other as they spend time together. As the fruit of the Spirit becomes deeply embedded in us, we begin to treat others with this fruit, and the result is a Christ-like character that endures the tough stuff of life.

(the following Christ-like behaviors come from J. I. Packer)

Love.

Love is the Christ-like reaction to people’s malice.

Didn’t Jesus demonstrate love on the cross? Love your neighbor as yourself, he said. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. The fruit of the Spirit enables you to do this when circumstances and relationships take a turn for the worse.

Joy.

Joy is the Christ-like reaction to depressing circumstances.

A couple of weeks ago, I spoke about the Jewish people coming together to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem after it had been in ruins for 100 years. As it lay in ruins, it took an emotional and physical toll on the people. Some were in despair. But as Nehemiah, their leader, coordinated the people to work on the wall, he said to them, "Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Peace.

Peace is the Christ-like reaction to troubles, threats and anxiety.

We often think of peace as the absence of conflict. But the Biblical idea of peace is simply not the absence of conflict but also includes the presence of harmony. It is not just ceasefire, but also community. It means breaking down the walls and facing the hostility for the sake of reconciliation....which I will remind you is our church mission statement....To make Christ known through reconciliation. Reconciliation is included in the fruit of the Holy Spirit. So may this church demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit.

Patience.

Patience is the Christ-like reaction to all that is maddening.

I hate to tell you this, but we can't develop patience in any other way than by waiting. Patience reminds us that we can't make anything happen on our own. Sometimes we just sit and wait. Patience is a willingness to let others and circumstances work and move at their own pace. We as a church are learning patience as we wait for a new pastor.

Kindness.

Kindness is the Christ-like reaction to all that are unkind.

People are often unkind because they themselves are hurting. To act kindly is to build them up and care for them. Kindness communicates, *I see you. I see your pain. And I believe that you are worthy of love.* It's a gift we give to others and a gift we're meant to receive from others as well.

Goodness.

Goodness is the Christ-like reaction to bad people and bad behavior.

When God created the heavens and the earth and humanity, God said, “It is good,” seven times—a number that alludes to completeness or perfection throughout biblical literature.

Goodness means participating with God in the kingdom work of calling everything back to good. Goodness whispers into the lives of friend, stranger, or enemy alike: “You are fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). We practice these whispers of goodness in day-to-day life.

Faithfulness and gentleness.

Faithfulness and gentleness are the Christ-like reactions to lies and fury.

We need to remember that our Savior’s own faithfulness did not look like success but rather death on a cross.

Gentleness: When Jesus entered into Jerusalem during Passover, the scripture passage says: “See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey...”

The word used to describe the most powerful figure Jerusalem has ever known is . . . gentleness...and faithfulness, even as he faced lies and fury.

Self-control.

Self-control is the Christ-like reaction to every situation that goads you to lose your cool and hit out.

It’s called restraint. It’s knowing how to wait before speaking, how to manage emotions, to set boundaries as Christ did.

Every morning as I get in the car to head to church, I say this prayer:

Heavenly Father, I pray this day I may live in your presence and please you more and more.

Lord Jesus Christ, I pray this day I may take up my cross and follow you.

Holy Spirit, I pray this day you fill me with all your fullness and your fruit will ripen within me: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

As I say this prayer, I trust this fruit will develop within me throughout my day. As Henri Nouwen said, "We have been called to be fruitful -- not successful, not productive, not accomplished." We as a church are called to be fruitful.

The fruit-filled life is a life of passion. The fruit is the very essence of who Christ is, and we are called to express these nine graces of Christ. So let's pray for this fruit of the Spirit for ourselves and for our church, and to demonstrate them to others. Let us pray this together.

Please stand and we will pray together the prayer in your bulletin.

Where we are guided by prejudice, **Fill us with love.**

Where we are guided by pessimism, **Fill us with joy.**

Where we are guided by misunderstanding, **Fill us with peace.**

Where we are guided by superficial quick-fixes, **Fill us with patience.**

Where we are guided by self-interest, **Fill us with kindness.**

Where we are guided by apathy, **Fill us with goodness.**

Where we are guided by convenience, **Fill us with faithfulness.**

Where we are guided by complacency, **Fill us with gentleness.**

Where we are guided by temptation, **Fill us with self-control.**