

Proper 8 (C)  
Holy Family Episcopal Church  
June 26, 2022

When I preached on Pentecost Sunday- three weeks ago, one of the things that I originally wanted to include was a discussion of the Fruit of the Spirit. But, I realized that my sermon was already quite long and I would wait for another time. Well, call it fate or maybe a “GOD- incidence”, but the Epistle for today is a portion of St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians, where he teaches the Church about the fruit of the Spirit. So, here’s my chance!

When people become Christians, their humanness, their natural desires do not disappear. These desires can be very strong. It is easy to be selfish. But the Holy Spirit teaches Christians how to live in the right way. The Holy Spirit always pleases God. People want to please themselves. Every day we have to choose how to behave. It is not easy, because it is a spiritual struggle. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us. When we live by the Spirit, we are not selfish. Instead, we live to please God. Christians are free from the law. They are not free to please themselves. But they are free to obey the Holy Spirit.

Our natural desires produce what Paul names the works of the flesh, which are not only hurtful to us, but also to one another.

Paul also notes the Fruit of the Spirit, which will make Christians agreeable to one another as well as make is happy.

Before we look at the fruit of the Spirit let me state at the beginning that Paul deliberately says ‘**fruit**’ singular. We can’t pick and choose these qualities - they must be **all** evident in the life of a believer. It’s not like picking the strawberries and mango out of the fruit salad on the buffet. It’s a complete package.

In nature, bearing fruit is not an optional extra. It is the major purpose of the tree’s life cycle. The fruit is the fundamental proof of inner life of the tree. Evidence of this fruit of the spirit in our lives is proof that the Spirit is working in and through us.

There is a conflict going on within each and every Christian – a conflict between ‘the Spirit’ and ‘the flesh.’ Paul says that if we walk by the Spirit we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. But what is ‘the flesh?’ ‘The flesh’ is what we are by nature. It is our fallen condition/nature. Then Paul lists the works of the flesh. They fall into four broad areas: Sexual, social, religious and alcohol. I think Paul is being as clear and as plain as he possibly can.

Paul then adds a very solemn warning. In his warning, he is not

speaking of the isolated lapse but of the habitual practice of these ‘works of the flesh.’ Such habitual practice gives evidence that the person concerned is not of Christ but of the ‘flesh’ and therefore is excluded from the kingdom of God. It is a stark warning.

In contrast to the works of the flesh that lead to exclusion from the kingdom of God, Paul lists the Fruit of the Spirit. There are 9 Christian graces listed which cover our attitude to God, to others and to ourselves. Let us look at each of these individually.

These are the attributes towards God:

**Love** – Paul uses the word ‘agape’ here for love and it this words association with God that gives the word its distinctive character. Divine love is unmerited, transforming and unchangeable. It is the love, which sent Christ to die for us. Now because the Holy Spirit is living within the believer this love is to be shown towards other Christians and the world. We are also exhorted throughout scripture to Love God because he first loved us. We are commanded to Love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Our love is a response to his love towards us. By our love for one another and for the world, the world is to come to know that we belong to Christ.

**Joy** – this is not the same as happiness. Happiness depends upon circumstances, but joy does not. Joy is seen in what was once lost spiritually is now found. Our chief joy is joy in God’s salvation of us as lost sinners.

**Peace** – our deepest peace is peace with God. Our deepest restlessness is the broken relationship we have with God because of our sin and He restores peace in our hearts and lives by saving us from our sins. This peace with God is expressed in peace of mind and in a very practical peace between all who know and love the Lord Jesus. This peace is to be seen in our homes, in the church and indeed in our relationships with all humanity.

The next three can be described as characteristics of a Christian’s life which are directed towards relationships with others.

**Patience** - that Christ-like character which does not seek vengeance or difficulties for those who oppose us. It means tolerating rudeness and unkindness, refusing to retaliate, turning the other cheek just as Christ did. This is not our natural inclination. We want to get even, we do not wish for anyone to believe they have gotten one up on us. Patience is a fruit to be

evident to and with everyone, especially with these closest to us and that is sometimes the most difficult of all.

**Kindness** - this is not just a negative toleration but also the positive benevolence of wishing all well. Kindness is the opposite of the natural tendency to tear one another down. Children know the people who are kind to them. As children of God we know His kindness towards us and we are therefore called to mirror this kindness in our lives towards others.

**Goodness** - This is the most active of the three here mentioned. It turns wishes into actions. It takes the initiative in serving other people in concrete and constructive ways. God wants us to do good just as His Son did - without expecting any return for it, without wanting any recognition except knowing that we do His will. This active goodness is the love that insists in doing all the good it can to and for all the people it can by all the means it can.

Some of these qualities we will have a natural disposition towards. Yet the passage tells us that all are to be in evidence in the life of a Spirit-filled believer.

The last three are generally assumed to be self-ward.

**Faithfulness-** the manifestation of our loyalty and faith to God that is unshakeable. It speaks of total trust in God's trustworthiness. This faithfulness is not something that we have in our strength, nor can we manufacture it or keep it. This fruit is clearly a gift from the Holy Spirit to enable us to be faithful to God not in the short term but over the long haul. The Christian life is not a sprint; it is much more like a marathon. We are called to be faithful everyday to Jesus. For some that will mean in difficult, maybe even dangerous situations.

**Gentleness** - is evident when we have a teachable spirit, when we have an honest and realistic estimation of ourselves and lack of pride. This is definitively not weakness. It is evidenced by the gentleness we display towards others because we are aware of our own faults, failings and sins before God. It is the opposite of all selfish ambition.

**Self-control-** primarily focuses on our individual behavior. It takes clear aim at the breakdown of moral behavior and of excesses in our lives. Every believer has to battle against the sinful desires in their lives - that is a battle we will fight daily. Yet the Holy Spirit helping us to do God's will and to win over sin in our lives wins that battle for us not by our own strength alone.

The fruit of the Spirit – again, not an optional extra in the life of a believer but the evidence that the Holy Spirit is in residence and working to make us more like Christ each day. But how do we ensure that the fruit of the Spirit is growing in our lives and is evidenced in our lives? Just as a natural tree requires healthy soil, the right food, careful pruning, a mixture of rain and sunshine in order to bear good fruit – the same is true of our lives. We require good nourishment from prayer, bible reading, and fellowship. We require careful pruning by God through His Word. We require the times of trial and blessing so that the fruit of the Spirit might be seen in our lives. Paul says ‘fruit’ – singular. This is not a pick and choose list – all of these must be evident in our lives. Also we must remember that any tree takes time to mature and bear fruit and we must give ourselves and our siblings in Christ time to mature and bear fruit. We cannot give up on ourselves or on each other, but must continually encourage each other.

Does the good news of God's blessing in Jesus take root in us and produce the fruit of the Spirit? God doesn't serve OUR own specific interests and purposes...and there will always be a cost to follow Jesus and it may very well cost you everything  
We are always faced with that choice everyday. Do we live life with God at our center regardless of where that leads, or do we live

life conforming to the ways of this world, focused on our own satisfaction and comforts?

And do we really want to love and include everyone? See this God who insists on forgiveness, mercy, and unlimited second chances? This God is certainly not fair. This God is too easy on folks...in fact Jesus seems to find worth with everyone especially outcasts and sinners.

So what's the good news? Well it's a promise so radical that anyone can miss it if they aren't actually looking for it! The good news is God is right here and now with all of us, however and wherever you are...in the good, the bad and the in-between... Bringing Grace to us all! Hope to us ALL! Forgiveness and Mercy to us all! Healing to us all! Joy to us ALL! Peace and Love to us all! This God shares His power with us!

The good news is that God comes to us ALL with NO exceptions and if you choose to follow Jesus then you too, as disciples, will bring God's Grace, Peace and Love to everyone...and this is not just Good news... but GREAT news for this world so desperately in need of God's gifts!