

***“Fresh and Fruity, Chapter 2: Orange You Glad?”***

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**Overbrook Presbyterian Church**

**19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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**First Scripture Lesson: Mark 7:14-23**

<sup>14</sup>Then He called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to Me, all of You, and understand: <sup>15</sup>there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”

<sup>17</sup>When He had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples asked Him about the parable. <sup>18</sup>He said to them, “Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, <sup>19</sup>since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.) <sup>20</sup>And He said, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. <sup>21</sup>For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup>adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. <sup>23</sup>All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

**Second Scripture Lesson: Galatians 5:16-25**

<sup>16</sup>Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. <sup>19</sup>Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup>envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup>By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. <sup>24</sup>And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.



**Sermon: *Fresh and Fruity, Chapter 2: Orange You Glad?***

Who here knows what a Troll is? If you're thinking about a wild haired doll from the nineties or a scary creature that lives under bridges and likes to challenge billy goats, you're on the wrong page.

A Troll, in the modern parlance of the internet, is one who does things specifically to irritate other people. A Troll comments on your Facebook post saying something intended to draw you into an argument and make you mad, not because they are passionate about the position, but because it's funny to get you riled up. A Troll sends you a link to an “important” news article that actually leads to a video of Rick Astley singing “*Never Gonna' Give You Up*” (By the way, this is called a “Rick Roll”). A Troll goes to a political rally wearing a t-shirt that says, “I'd rather be Russian than a Democrat.”

That last one actually happened last week here in Ohio (Yay Ohio!) when two men wore shirts bearing that slogan to a rally in Lewis Center. Fact of the matter is, they meant those words about as much as did the people who said they would move to Canada if Donald Trump were elected president. But their point was not to make an honest statement. It was to provoke a reaction.

Trolling your friends is what we used to call pranking them or busting their chops. But what we're seeing in the public realm today goes beyond good natured playfulness. And it goes right up to the top of our government. But as our public discourse gets more toxic, we must work to keep that bad behavior - the trolling and the antagonizing from becoming normalized behavior. Which means **we** need to be our better selves. For Christians, it means walking in the spirit.

Now last week we started with our study of the fruits of the spirit that Paul writes about in his letter to the Galatians. We talked about how Paul drew a distinction between works of the flesh and fruits of the spirit. But that by "flesh," he wasn't necessarily talking about things we do that are enjoyable. He was speaking in broader terms of our propensity to do things that are counter to God's will.

In the simplest terms, "Spirit" is God. "Flesh" is not God. In fact, you will notice in the passage I just read, that when Paul talks about "desires of the flesh" his focus is not on activities that our puritan ancestors called sin. He mainly calls out behaviors that make our relationships with one another toxic: enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarreling, dissension, and factions.

When Paul says to "not gratify the desires of the flesh," he's not talking about living an ascetic lifestyle. He's not talking about running off to join a convent or a monastery. And we shouldn't read it as a call to avoiding drinking, dancing, playing cards, and all-you-can-eat buffets. When Paul writes about "flesh" he's talking about our human propensity to embrace that which runs counter to the will of God.

But the interesting thing about translating ancient Greek, is that the line "Live by the Spirit... and do not gratify the desires of the flesh" can also be read as a statement of cause and effect: IF you walk by the Spirit, THEN you won't gratify the flesh.

Which makes sense, if you think about it. If you're busy exercising, you're not going to be sitting in front of the TV eating ice cream out of the container. If you commit yourself to reading a new book every week, you're not going to spend time binge-watching Parks and Rec on Netflix. If you make the effort to see the good in people, you'll be less likely to assume that everyone is heartless and evil. If you're acting out of love and peace, you won't have time for enmity and strife.

The way to avoid anger and quarrelling and enmity and strife, is to be fresh and fruity; it's to live the fruits of the spirit. Over the next three Sundays we will explore what these ideals meant to Paul and what they might look like in our lives. Today, we talk about Love, Joy, and Peace.

### **Love**

Love is a big deal in the Bible. The first memory verse so many of us learned as children was John 3:16: which begins "For God so loved the world..." Everything that God does grows out of love. And because God loves us, we are supposed to love each other. And yet we struggle with that simple command over and over. Why? Because we seem to keep confusing the word "Love" with the word "Like." In all the places throughout scripture where we are taught to love God and each other, nowhere are we told that we have to actually like each other.

Love is one of those complicated words. In fact, the concept is so broad that there are at least three common words in Greek that cover different aspects of love. There's "Philia," which is the love between friends. Phila-delphia is called the city of brotherly love for a reason. There's "Eros" which is the passion and romance between lovers. The word "erotic" comes from this Greek root. And then there is "Agape,"

the word that means more unconditional love such as God's love for us. Unconditional love, by its nature, is based on loving people, even when they're not very love-able.

Here in Galatians, Paul is using Agape. Which is also the word he uses in 1 Corinthians 13 when he writes extensively about what love is. You see, there's a reason Jesus and Paul don't talk about "liking" people. And that's because they were not concerned with whether or not we like each other. People are quirky, and that means some of them aren't very likeable. When Will Rogers said, "I never met a man I didn't like," he was probably just being nice.

But it's immaterial because you don't need to like someone to love them. When you look at your spouse or your partner, you might feel a burst of romantic energy. You might feel your heart race a bit. You might even feel a sense of everything being right with the world. (Especially if you've had a glass of wine or two.) But for your neighbor who revs his motorcycle at 7:00 on a Saturday morning or your roommate who never cleans up after herself, maybe those feelings aren't quite so warm and cordial

But Paul isn't concerned about feelings. He is concerned about actions. Love is what we do to and for one another. Our feelings don't enter into it. And in First Corinthians 13, Paul explains what love looks like. He writes that love is patient, and kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing – but, rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Walking in the spirit means being loving toward others, even when we don't like them very much.

### **Joy**

Growing up we always sang in Sunday School. And one of the old standards was "I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart (where?) Down in my heart (WHERE?) down in my heart... And as a teenager I remember hearing preachers say that if I just had Jesus in my heart, I would know joy like I'd never known before. And yet when I prayed that prayer, I noticed that my life was still as challenging as it was before. Girls still didn't give me the time of day. Calculus was still like a foreign language.

But my problem was that I thought as a Christian, I was always supposed to be happy. I see that from people a lot. The forced smiles, the refusal to admit the pain they experience in their lives. As though admitting to experiencing difficulty and having bad days were to betray the faith. Except Jesus never says that we will be happy all the time. Joy is rather, the ability to express thanksgiving for the ways God has blessed us even if we are struggling through a difficult situation.

Sometimes joy includes happiness. In the Old Testament especially, the people of God celebrated when things were good. Joyful feasts characterized by good wine and good food and shouting and dancing allowed the people to acknowledge God's power and goodness in their lives. In the New Testament that continues, but there is also the sense of celebrating even through suffering.

In the early church, when Christians were persecuted they could still find a way to celebrate that the return of Christ would bring a relief to their oppression. 1 Peter 4:13 expresses this: "Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when His glory is revealed."

But in a world where challenges abound, global warming, poverty, terrorism and a whole litany of scary, frightening things, the question may be how can we be happy? But for the person who walks in the spirit,

there is always joy because there is always something to celebrate, even if it is just another day to feel the warm sun on your face, and the breath of fresh air in your lungs.

You see, bad things happen to everyone. Difficulty is not an aberration. Life is just hard sometimes. Hardship isn't a bug, it's a feature. No one's life matches our ideals of perfection. But the joyful person is one who can see their blessings through the clouds. Joy is not being free from pain. Joy is realizing that pain does not own you.

I've known happiness in my life: my wedding day, the days when Will Grey and Harry were born, but one of the best lessons in joy I ever got was riding a bus through the dark South Carolina night back in 1986.

My high school football coach was a stern man, which is not unusual, and he did not tolerate joking and playfulness when, as he would put it, "You need to have your mind on your bid-ness." (That's "business" for those of you who don't speak Southern.) Once after a particularly poor performance at Wilson High School in Florence, SC, my teammates and I got back on the bus and began the long, quiet ride home. We weren't supposed to talk and we sure weren't supposed to be joking around. We were in the midst of a 17-game losing streak and we were supposed to be seriously reflecting on our performance, how truly dismal it had been, and how we were going to get better before next time.

But I found myself in the back of the bus, sitting with one of my teammates who simply could not dwell on negative things. His first sarcastic comment brought a smile to my face. His second brought a snicker. We struggled to keep from laughing, but before long we were rolling as he cracked wise about how bad we had played.

Our coach wasn't happy and said so loudly. Maybe if we had been more serious, like him, we would have been a better team. I was exhausted. My body hurt. And losing stinks. But on a hard day, I was thankful for friends who don't take life so seriously. I had found a little joy riding down a highway through the dark Carolina night.

The person who walks in the spirit may see the troubles of this world, but if you are looking for the beautiful and the amazing and the truly good, you will see it everywhere. And in those good gifts we will find joy. And when we celebrate goodness and celebrate one another, we share joy, even in the most difficult days.

### **Peace**

When we think of peace we usually think of non-violence. Which is a perfect place to start. We will make an incredible difference in the world if we just choose peace. In our society where we seem to fear everything and depend on violence and threats of violence to feel secure, making peace has never been more important. But also, in an increasingly divisive society that seems to value winning or, as we pointed out earlier, antagonizing our "opponents" - where getting along with one another is often seen as weakness, we need to work towards peace; towards reconciliation and if not acceptance of one another's eccentricities, then at least tolerance of them.

But peace is not just an absence of violence or strife. In the Hebrew tradition, peace, "Shalom," is the concept of wholeness and completeness in our lives. When we have peace, we have physical and spiritual

resources sufficient for our needs.<sup>1</sup> Peace means right relationship with God and one another, right relationship that is characterized by justice.<sup>2</sup>

Being at peace means finding contentment in our situation and not investing all our time and energy into having more and being more. But peace in our society means helping others to have enough. It means eliminating the fear of scarcity; the worry of how to feed and provide for our families. Peace means not having to choose between paying the rent and paying for your child's seizure medicine. Peace means not living in fear that you will be persecuted because of the color of your skin or the person that you love or the language in which you pray.

We want peace for ourselves: contentment, comfort, security, ease. But our peace is tied to that of our neighbors. So as Pope Paul VI famously wrote in 1972 "If you want peace, work for justice."<sup>3</sup>



We live in the Spirit when we try to produce good fruit. And when we do, the Holy Spirit can take our efforts and use them to produce a bigger, more abundant harvest. When we love, love grows in others. When we are joyful, it is the seed of more joy in others. When we work for peace, it begets more peace, and so on. We live in the Spirit by doing the kinds of things that are Spirit driven, and when we commit to producing good fruit, the Holy Spirit can take what we do and make a bountiful, life-giving harvest.

But it all starts with one person, choosing to live in the Spirit, choosing to bear good fruit.

Be it. Bear it. Share it.

To God be all glory, honor, power and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Healey, Joseph P. "Peace: Old Testament." *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, Doubleday, 1992, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> Stamm, Raymond T. "To Live as Sons And Heirs of God (Galatians 5:22-24)." *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 10, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Abingdon, 1982, p. 565.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Paul VI. "Message of His Holiness Pope Paul VI for the Celebration of the Day of Peace." Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 Jan. 1972.