

“Fresh and Fruity, Chapter 3: Berry Good!”

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Overbrook Presbyterian Church

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First Scripture Lesson: Philippians 4:4-9

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Second Scripture Lesson: Galatians 5:16-25

¹⁶Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For 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. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, 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. ²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.



Sermon: *Fresh and Fruity, Chapter 3: Berry Good!*

This week we continue working through Paul’s Fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5. I know that some of you might have missed a week or two of this series, so I’ll start with a quick review to catch everyone up to speed.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul is addressing a controversy of sorts. Remember, the early church is not a new thing, it is an old thing that has been dramatically changed. The early church is actually made up of reformed Jews and new converts who have no background in Judaism. A lot of questions arose in that time about what role Jewish law should play in the life of these new disciples.

In this letter, Paul is writing to counsel the Galatian Christians about what true discipleship looks like. In this passage, Paul argues that the life of the Disciple should be lived in the Spirit, not in strict observance of the law. But if the law is not followed, how does one live a holy life that honors God? Is everything glorifying? Is everything acceptable? No, says Paul. Live in the spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

And then we established that when Paul speaks of “flesh” he means the human propensity to do that which runs counter to the will of God. “Walking in the Spirit” is the opposite of that. And how does one walk in the spirit, by living lives dedicated to doing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These qualities Paul calls the “fruit of the spirit.” When we try to live by these fruits of the Spirit, God can take our efforts and multiply them, spreading the fruit of the spirit everywhere.

So, what does this kind of “fruity” life look like? Well, last week we talked about love as our actions towards others, specifically as Paul describes them in 1st Corinthians 13 and how love is not about our feelings, but about *what* we do. Which explains how we can love even those we consider our worst enemies. We talked about joy and that while joy can include genuine happiness, it is actually more than that. True joy is being able to celebrate God’s goodness to us even in times of difficulty; even when we do not feel particularly happy. And we discussed peace which is more than the absence of violence. Peace is wholeness and completeness in our lives and in the world around us.

So, this week we proceed on our tour of Paul’s fruit of the Spirit with patience, kindness, and generosity.

Patience

Now, to most people, patience probably means being able to wait without getting irritated. Waiting for your discussion partner to get to the punchline of an interminable story; waiting for your pizza delivery person to find your address; waiting for Christmas to get here. And patience is required in all those situations.

But what Paul is talking about here is more than just waiting without getting irritated. The kind of patience he describes includes a sense of endurance and longsuffering. William Barclay notes that in the New Testament, this kind of patience commonly describes the attitude of God towards men (Romans 2:4, 9:22, 1 Timothy 1:16, 1 Peter 3:20).¹ It is the word that describes the way God endures the sinfulness of humanity without abandoning us or turning away from us. In Romans 2, Paul writes “Do you despise the riches of [God’s] kindness and forbearance and *patience*? Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”²

This patient endurance is an important concept in human relationships, too. Because it is all too easy to simply cast off those with whom we disagree or who are too challenging to be in relationship with. And this is especially important in our current divisive political climate.

I have a friend who is very set in his political ideals. He votes for one party and has very little tolerance for the views and policies of the other. Fair enough. We all get to decide for whom we will vote and we all get to hold our own ideas about how government should run. That is the glory of a free democracy. But his daughter, who left home for college last fall, came home this summer with a young man on her arm who does not share her father’s political views. And is, in fact, firmly entrenched on the other side of the aisle.

“How could she...? Doesn’t she know...?” The drama was thick. How would they get along? Would they have anything to talk about? Would someone leave the house in a huff? Or be kicked out? The good news is patience abounded. Father endured the new boyfriend’s presence and his daughter’s choice because he loves his daughter and because that is the right thing to do.

There’s an old story about Abraham facing such a challenge (perhaps it comes from Hebrew tradition or maybe it was made-up by some pastor who needed an illustration).

Abraham was sitting outside his tent one evening when he saw an old man, weary from age and journey, coming toward him. Abraham rushed out, greeted him, and then invited him into his tent. There he washed the old man's feet and gave him food and drink.

The old man immediately began eating without saying any prayer or blessing. So Abraham asked him, "Don't you worship God?"

The old traveler replied, "I worship fire only and reverence no other god." When he heard this, Abraham became incensed, grabbed the old man by the shoulders, and threw him out of his tent into the cold night air.

When the old man had departed, God called to his friend Abraham and asked where the stranger was. Abraham replied, "I forced him out because he did not worship You."

God answered, "I have suffered him these eighty years although he dishonors me. Could you not endure him one night?"³

Kindness

Kindness should be self-explanatory and for the most part, it is. To be kind should be the defining characteristic of our relationships with one another. I have always been told that if you can't say something kind, then don't say anything. To be kind is to be nice, considerate, and warm toward others.

But it is interesting to point out that the word translated here as kindness, is used elsewhere in the Bible in some interesting ways that shine more light on the concept. In Luke 5, when Jesus teaches about old wine in new wineskins, he says this: "And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good.'"⁴ The word that's translated "good" is the same one that Paul uses for kindness. Like good wine, when we are kind, we are smooth and mellow to one another.

It is also the word used to describe Christ's yoke in Matthew 11:30. When Jesus says, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." That word "easy" is Paul's word "kindness"; that is, it does not chafe. When we are kind to one another, we don't rub each other the wrong way.

Kindness is the opposite of hostility. Hostility reacts to perceived slights or threats. Kindness is proactive. It is a decision to be "mellow" and good towards another person. The kids would use the word "chill." On the television series "Parks and Recreation", in the last season we are introduced to a large social media corporation not unlike Facebook, called Gryzzl. Their motto is "Wouldn't it be tight if everyone was chill to each other?"⁵

The answer is yes. It *would* be tight if everyone was chill to each other. That would be what Paul calls kindness.

Generosity

To be generous is, like most of the things on Paul's list, multi-layered. At its most basic, generosity is to readily give of one's time and treasure.

Most of you have probably heard of about the school that NBA star LeBron James opened this month. The new contract that he just signed with the Lakers this summer will reportedly pay him \$153.3 million over the next 4 to 5 years.⁶ That's an awful lot of money. But James has used part of that money to start a

school for at-risk kids in his hometown of Akron, Ohio. Not only will students attend Lebron James' "I Promise" school for free, but every one of the students who graduates high school will receive free tuition to attend the University of Akron.⁷

That is a great example of generosity. But you don't have to be mega-rich to be generous with what you have. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus holds up the poor widow who has very little but still gives her two coins at the temple, as an example faithful generosity.⁸

But generosity is more than just giving what we have. It also carries the connotation of magnanimity. That's a great word. One who is magnanimous forgives when he or she is not required to. The one who is magnanimous does more than is expected of them.

And generosity is certainly connected to being unselfish, but in more ways than just stuff. The one who is generous accounts for the needs of others and is considerate of others' needs. The one who is generous takes consequences for others into account when making decisions about his/her actions. Being generous is not just philanthropy and charity; it's about goodness and kindness that is expressed in genuine selfless concern for others.

It's the 13-year-old who patiently shares his apple slices with his younger, autistic brother, because he knows it will make that little brother happy. It's the woman who sits patiently by the bedside of her older mother-in-law with dementia, listening to the same stories over and over again, giving of herself so that an old woman won't have to spend her days alone. Generosity is assuming the best in people, not the worst; it's giving second chances and third chances, when none are warranted; it's giving the benefit of the doubt.

Generosity is valuing the needs of others and working to help and care for others, even when, especially when it does not benefit us directly.



Patience, Kindness, Generosity. In his book, *The Salmon of Doubt*,⁹ author Douglas Adams tells a story that I believe illustrates all three. Mr. Adams writes:

This actually did happen to a real person, and the real person is me. I had gone to catch a train. This was April 1976, in Cambridge, U.K. I was a bit early for the train. I'd gotten the time of the train wrong. I went to get myself a newspaper to do the crossword, and a cup of coffee and a packet of cookies. I went and sat at a table. I want you to picture the scene. It's very important that you get this very clear in your mind. Here's the table, newspaper, cup of coffee, packet of cookies. There's a guy sitting opposite me, perfectly ordinary-looking guy wearing a business suit, carrying a briefcase. It didn't look like he was going to do anything weird. What he did was this: he suddenly leaned across, picked up the packet of cookies, tore it open, took one out, and ate it.

Now this, I have to say, is the sort of thing the British are very bad at dealing with. There's nothing in our background, upbringing, or education that teaches you how to deal with someone who in broad daylight has just stolen your cookies. You know what would happen if this had been South Central Los Angeles. There would have very quickly been gunfire, helicopters coming in, CNN, you know... But in the end, I did what any red-blooded Englishman would do: I ignored it. And I stared

at the newspaper, took a sip of coffee, tried to do a clue in the newspaper, couldn't do anything, and thought, "What am I going to do?"

In the end I thought "Nothing for it, I'll just have to go for it," and I tried very hard not to notice the fact that the packet was already mysteriously opened. I took out a cookie for myself. I thought, That settled him. But it hadn't because a moment or two later he did it again. He took another cookie. Having not mentioned it the first time, it was somehow even harder to raise the subject the second time around. "Excuse me, I couldn't help but notice..." I mean, it doesn't really work.

We went through the whole packet like this. When I say the whole packet, I mean there were only about eight cookies, but it felt like a lifetime. He took one, I took one, he took one, I took one. Finally, when we got to the end, he stood up and walked away. Well, we exchanged meaningful looks, then he walked away, and I breathed a sigh of relief and sat back.

A moment or two later the train was coming in, so I tossed back the rest of my coffee, stood up, picked up the newspaper, and underneath the newspaper were my cookies. The thing I like particularly about this story is the sensation that somewhere in England there has been wandering around for the last quarter-century a perfectly ordinary guy who's had the same exact story, only he doesn't have the punch line.

He may not have the good punchline, but that stranger gives us an amazing example of kindness, and patience and generosity.



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 are patient, others learn by our example and are patient, too. When we are kind, it inspires kindness in others. When we are generous, people pass that generosity on to others. 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

¹ "The Lovely Things, Galatians 5:22-26" *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, by William Barclay, Westminster Press, 1976, pp. 50-51. The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition.

² Romans 2:4, NRSV

³ Larson, Craig Brian. "Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching: from Leadership Journal." *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching: from Leadership Journal*, Baker Books, 1993, p. 172.

⁴ Luke 5:39, NRSV

⁵ Daniels, Greg, and Michael Schur. "Gryzzlbox." *Parks and Recreation*, season 7, episode 5, NBC, 27 Jan. 2015.

⁶ Ganguli, Tania. "It's Official: LeBron James Signs \$153.3-Million Contract with Lakers." *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 9 July 2018, 7:10 PM, www.latimes.com/sports/lakers/la-sp-lakers-lebron-signs-20180709-story.html.

⁷ Perano, Ursula, and Nadeem Muaddi. "Lebron James Opens Elementary School, Guarantees College Tuition to Graduates." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 4 Aug. 2018, 4:25 PM, www.cnn.com/2018/08/04/us/lebron-james-opens-school-trnd/index.html.

⁸ Luke 21:1-4, NRSV

⁹ "Cookies." *The Salmon of Doubt*, by Douglas Adams, Pocket Books (Simon & Schuster), 2005, pp. 150–151.