

***“Fresh and Fruity, Chapter 4: Plum Amazing!”*****Reverend Bill Gause****Overbrook Presbyterian Church****21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time****August 26, 2018****First Scripture Lesson: Romans 12:9-21**

<sup>9</sup>Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup>love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup>Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. <sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” <sup>20</sup>No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**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 4: Plum Amazing!***

It is often said that you can't tell a book by its cover. And that is true. The cover art may look interesting, but you're not going to know if it's worth your time to read it, until you actually sit down and start reading. And that basic truth is consistent across our lives ... which is why it is such a common cliché: To really know something or someone, you have to get past what's on the outside, and discover what's on the inside.

That's the same with a lot of things, really. Those dented cans you sometimes find in the discount bin at the grocery store; the ones without labels? The only way to know what they really are is by taking a can opener to them and pouring out their contents.

Salt and pepper shakers can be kind of tricky that way, too. I was eating in a restaurant with my sister a few weeks ago where the decoration was an extensive salt & pepper shaker collection. There were some really cool ones, but I noticed that a lot of them featured form over function. They looked great, but there was no way to tell which was salt and which was pepper. The only way to find out, is to turn one upside down and give it a shake.

And people are the same way. The only way to know who a person is, what is the nature of their character, is by what comes out of them. That doesn't mean taking a can opener to them or giving them a good shake, it means watching and listening for what they say and do. Paul understood that. That's why he constantly encourages the early church to live by God's Holy Spirit; saying and doing that which glorifies God and advances God's Kingdom.

And in doing so, Paul echoes the teachings of Jesus. In a passage we read just two weeks ago, Jesus tells His disciples

*...whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile [them],<sup>19</sup> since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer... It is what comes out of a person that defiles [them]... For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come...<sup>1</sup>*

What Paul says here in Galatians is that we should work to live in the Spirit of God and that means making sure that what comes out of us is not bitter works of the flesh; things like enmity and strife, but sweet, and good things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are what he calls fruit of the spirit. We've spent the last three weeks talking about this passage and delving into what that fruit is and how we can manifest it in our own lives.

We've talked about love as our actions towards others, 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. 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.

We talked about patience which is endurance and long-suffering and one of the defining characteristics of God's relationship with humanity. We said that kindness is when we are mellow and smooth to each other, like good wine. And that generosity is more than being charitable with what we have, it's being magnanimous and gracious and forgiving towards each other.

And today we will bring our discussion to a close with the last three things on Paul's list: faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

### **Faithfulness**

Faithfulness can certainly mean trusting in God. And trusting in God means living like we believe the things Jesus said and trusting that His way really is the best way. But Paul would have assumed some basic trust in God among his readers, so what he actually means here is to be trustworthy. Not putting your trust in someone else so much as being the kind of person that others can put their trust in.

Think George Washington being so honest that he couldn't lie when his father asked him about chopping down a cherry tree. Think of making a handshake deal where no legal paperwork is necessary because those two people are so trustworthy that their word is good enough.

When people lack that faithfulness, it can be frustrating. Ever make arrangements for someone to come help you do something at a later date, and then when that date arrives, they don't show up, "because, well, you never said anything else about it, so I didn't know if we were still doing that."

To be faithful is to be the kind of person upon which others can rely. Your word is gold. Your handshake is your bond. It means that you can be counted on, to tell the truth and to follow through on your commitments. It means being there when you said you would be, doing what you said you would do; keeping the secret that was entrusted to you; being present not just when things are good, but when life is challenging. Being trustworthy means being true to Jesus' teachings, even when they are hard.

One place where that is so important today is in the sharing of information. So much information is available at our fingertips and all it takes is a click of a mouse to share it with everyone we know. And we do, even when it's not true; even when it's hurtful.

Mark Twain once said, "A lie can travel half-way around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes."

Actually, that's not something Mark Twain wrote. That line originates with 17<sup>th</sup> century Irish satirist Jonathon Swift.<sup>2</sup> But you believed me, didn't you? It sounds like something Mark Twain would have said. (That's why I try to confirm everything I say and write in these sermons, and it's why I generally cite my sources. So, you can trust that the facts I state are accurate.) You see, sometimes we spread misinformation, rumor, and outright falsehood completely by accident.

In this digital age when passing along misinformation can be as easy as clicking a mouse, we should strive to be people of truth. So, take a minute before you share, to confirm that story on another news website that you trust. And make use of reliable factcheckers like Snopes.com, Factcheck.org, and Politifact.com before you pass things along.

And when you hear a juicy rumor, let it die with you. I read a message board post the other day that called out a former star football player as being a bad person for being involved in a financial scandal that bilked hundreds of people out of their life savings. Turns out it wasn't him. But it's too late now, because the rumor has been spread.

Faithfulness is trusting in God, but it's also being the kind of people that others can trust.

### **Gentleness**

We know what "gentle" looks like. And this isn't one of those tricky Greek words that really means something else. Gentleness means to be gentle and considerate.<sup>3</sup> One source tells us that in ancient Greek writings, this word would be defined as "mild and gentle friendliness ... and is the opposite of ... bad temper or sudden anger ... It is the mark of the cultured and wise person who remains calm, even in the face of abuse."<sup>4</sup>

This gentleness should not be confused with meekness, though. There is not present a sense of "spineless lack of resistance even to those things which are evil."<sup>5</sup> Rather, in our resistance to evil and our correction of brothers and sisters who err, we are to be gentle.

That is not to say we don't stand up for what is right and we don't point out when a brother or sister is doing something wrong. But we do so not in anger, but with gentleness.

Think about the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, himself inspired by Mahatma Ghandi's campaign of civil disobedience in India. Think about the way that Martin Luther King spoke out against the evils of racism without using foul language or calling people childish names. Think about the way he used truth and

gentleness to try to persuade men and women of his time to do the right thing. Think about the way he resisted evil practices supported by the law of the land, without turning to violent revolution.

He was strong and vocal, but he was not hostile; He was gentle, but he was not meek. That's what we are called to be, in our relationships with one another - in our interactions with those who stand against God's will and in our responses to those who are hateful towards us.

### **Self-Control.**

Again, this is pretty straightforward. Self-Control is "Mastery over the desires of the self..."<sup>6</sup>

When I was a high school senior, I went on a weekend trip with several classmates to a leadership conference at Presbyterian College in Clinton, SC. It was a full slate of meetings and lectures and a few fun activities thrown in.

On the last day, when it was time to go, everyone got up and packed their bags, showered, got dressed and went to breakfast. One of our group, a young man named Art, stayed tucked in his bed, snoozing softly. We tried to wake him, but he just rolled over, apparently willing to forgo food and a shower in order to enjoy a few more minutes of sleep.

After breakfast, we went to our last lecture in the auditorium. Art was nowhere to be found.

An hour or so later, the event ended, we all said our good-byes, got on the bus, and prepared for the trip home. But where was Art?

We sat there in the parking lot, engine running, ready to leave, and still, no Art. No one had seen him and no one knew where he was. So, one of our members got out and ran back to our dorm to check and see if he might be having trouble with his bags or something. When he walked into the room, there was Art, still sound asleep in bed.

Self-control is our ability to master our own bodies and our own desires. In First Corinthians, Paul uses the same word to describe the discipline of an athlete.<sup>7</sup> Our impulses can be powerful. And sometimes we don't even realize we've given in to them until it's too late. But for the person living according to the Spirit, making the effort is important.

And self-control is intricately connected to all the fruit we have talked about to this point. Where loving or being patient or kind or gentle flies in the face of what the world would expect or allow, or frankly, what would feel good, our self-control; our ability to manage our own emotions and reactions, is what keeps us walking in the Spirit and not giving in to what Paul calls "the desires of the flesh."

Self-control is what gets you out of bed early in the morning to make that appointment; to be where you said you would be, even when we would much rather stay curled up in those warm covers.

Self-control is what helps you scroll on past those annoying posts on Facebook and Twitter instead of immediately firing off a snide, rude comment of your own. It's also what helps us when we do respond; responding with kindness and gentleness that keeps our friends accountable but does so by telling the truth in love.

Self-control is what drives us to avoid our worst instincts and embrace our better selves.

But self-control is not the same thing as not self-negation. We can control our bodies and our minds to more closely conform to the will of God, but that does not mean that we deny our own needs. Self-care is important, and we must take time to rest, to eat, and even sometimes to rest long and eat unhealthily.

Finally, I will point out that when Paul describes the Fruit of the Spirit, he writes about “Fruit,” not “Fruits.” He does not pluralize the word. Even though I have spoken several times over the last three weeks about “these fruits;” the Greek word here is singular: “Fruit of the Spirit.”

You see, the fruit of the spirit is everything we’ve been talking about; not just part of it. The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, *all together*.

Bible scholar Donald Guthrie writes:

*“Paul uses the singular ‘fruit’ rather than the plural, because the [plural] would suggest a number of variegated products, whereas his real aim is to show the various aspects of the one harvest. Not **one** of those qualities which Paul names can be isolated and treated as an end in itself.”<sup>8</sup>*

It is one thing that cannot be separated. If we express or experience only love without kindness or joy without self-control, then we have not seen the fruit of the spirit, only aspects of it.



There’s an old song we used to sing at camp growing up. It’s not as common anymore, but it still rings true - “*They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love.*” The point of that song was not to say that others are incapable of love, but rather to remind us, we disciples, that others will know that we walk in the spirit and are followers of Jesus Christ, by what we do and by what we say; they will know we are Christians by the good fruit that comes out of us.

And when that fruit is lacking, they will know that we are not who we say we are.

In the world today, there is not enough of the Fruit of the Spirit. There is plenty of enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, idolatry and all of the things Paul decries in his letter to the Galatians – but, it doesn’t have to be that way. We live in the Spirit when we produce good fruit. And when we do, the Holy Spirit can take our efforts and use them to produce a bigger, more abundant, life-giving harvest. And it all starts with us, choosing to live in the Spirit, choosing to bear good fruit.

So 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> Mark 7:18-23, NRSV

<sup>2</sup> Chokshi, Niraj. "That Wasn't Mark Twain: How a Misquotation Is Born." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 26 Apr. 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/04/26/books/famous-misquotations.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/26/books/famous-misquotations.html).

<sup>3</sup> "The Lovely Things, Galatians 5:22-26" *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, by William Barclay, Westminster Press, 1976, pp. 51-52. The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Hauck, Friedrich, and Siegfried Schulz. "Praus, Prautes." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, Vol. VI, Eerdmans, 2006, p. 646.

<sup>5</sup> "Christian Life as Life in the Spirit 5:16-26." *Galatians*, by Donald Guthrie, Eerdmans, 1992, p. 140. The New Century Bible Commentary.

<sup>6</sup> Guthrie, p. 140

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, NRSV

<sup>8</sup> Guthrie, P. 139