

“Rooty Tooty Fresh and Fruity”
Reverend Bill Gause
Overbrook Presbyterian Church
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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First Scripture Lesson: Luke 6:43-49

⁴³“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; ⁴⁴for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. ⁴⁶“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you? ⁴⁷I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. ⁴⁸That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.”

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: *Rooty Tooty Fresh and Fruity*

In 1985, the International House of Pancakes chain of breakfast restaurants colloquially known as “IHOP,” introduced America to Rooty Tooty, Fresh N’ Fruity Pancakes.¹ What makes them different from regular pancakes, you might ask? What is it that merits a slightly higher cost and a greater degree of embarrassment when ordering?

Fruit. The thing that separates the Rooty Tooty, Fresh N’ Fruity Pancake from your regular, run of the mill pancake, is the fruit on top of them.

Fruit is natural and sweet and delicious. Long before humans invented ice cream and cheesecake; long before we figured out how to turn cocoa beans into something amazing and delicious, our primary sugar delivery system was fruit. Apples, peaches, oranges, mangos, plums, just growing free, a gift from God of pure enjoyment. Fruit is evidence that God created us not just to survive in this world, but to thrive in it; not just to live, but to enjoy life.

So, when Paul writes to the Christians in Galatia about the life of the disciple; as he tries to show them that living in God's Spirit is desirable, he compares the goodness of the Christian walk to fruit. The fruity goodness of the life of the spirit includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are the ways that God's spirit manifests Herself in our lives and the ways that we can embrace that spirit.

And his words echo Jesus' teachings in Matthew² and Luke, that you will know a tree by its fruit. Good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit. So, what makes the person who walks in the Spirit of God different from the rest of the world? Fruit. Sweet, delicious fruit.

Over these next few Sundays we're going to talk a lot about fruit; specifically, about Paul's fruits of the spirit that we find here in Galatians 5. And hopefully we're going to learn how to live lives in the Spirit; lives that are Rooty Tooty, Fresh and Fruity.

Sometimes we forget that the early Christians were just reformed Jews. Jesus was a Jew. The disciples were mostly Jews. Paul was a Jew. So, the question the early church struggled with, was how much of that Hebrew history and tradition should be incorporated into these new lives of discipleship following the teachings of Jesus?

It's not even always easy to pin down Jesus on the matter, because at some points he reinterprets or appears to act counter to Hebrew Law, as when he picks grain and heals the sick on the Sabbath³ or says that it's not what you eat that makes a person unclean but what that person says and does.⁴ But then he also says "Until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."⁵

So, do Christians have to keep the laws of Moses? Some early Christian leaders and missionaries said "Yes." But Paul disagrees. Paul argues repeatedly that if it helps Jews to be faithful then certainly, observe the law, but that new converts and Gentiles should not be expected to also embrace strict observance of Jewish laws.

The letter to the Galatians deals a lot with this controversy. Paul is writing to counsel the Galatian Christians about what true discipleship looks like. In this passage, made famous for its reference to fruits of the Spirit, Paul argues that the life of the Disciple should be lived in the Spirit, not in 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.

Living in the Spirit is key. But what does that look like? How does one live in the Spirit? Do we embrace the monastic life, spending our days in prayer and meditation? Do we reject every facet of worldly life that may be deemed gratifying? TV, Music, Good food? Things we enjoy; that make us feel good? That's certainly what some Christians try to do. I had friends growing up who weren't allowed to listen to secular music or dance or play video games. And they certainly weren't allowed to date. One of my old school mates that I hear from time to time, actually broke off his engagement when he found out that his fiancé drank alcohol. Not too excess, mind you. She just thought a drink with dinner was fine. He, a very conservative Christian who saw alcohol as gratifying the flesh, disagreed. That kind of ascetic lifestyle is helpful to some Christians. Don't get me wrong. But it's not what Paul is encouraging here.

Paul here draws a distinction between Spirit and Flesh. And Christians have often taken this to mean that within each one of us there is a spiritual side and a worldly side. Spirit is the part of us that is from God;

pure, divine, holy. Flesh is the created part of us that is of this world: sinful, corrupted, dirty. Except Paul isn't saying anything like this. In Hebrew tradition, there is no separation between body and soul. There is only the person. The notion of a divided self, part spiritual and part flesh, is a decidedly Greek idea, expanded upon greatly by our Puritan ancestors.

For the Christian, influenced by our Hebrew roots, the body is not a bad thing. It is who we are. The things we do with our bodies, the work of our hands, the words of our mouths, are not antithetical to being a healthy, spiritual being. They are intricately interwoven and interconnected.

Spiritual well-being and physical well-being cannot be separated. When we try, we get abhorrent practices like slavery which allows for the mistreatment of human beings so long as their spiritual needs are met by taking them to church. Separating physical and spiritual allows us to see people struggling in abject poverty or as victims of war and oppression and do nothing so long as we pray for them and teach them about Jesus.

Our physical and spiritual selves are inseparable. But Paul is not here talking about a battle between something within ourselves that is spiritual and something else that is physical. When Paul speaks of "the desires of the Flesh," he is talking about a broader idea: "the evil impulses that underlie and empower human sin."⁶ This is not just about sexual misconduct. In fact, the list of "works of the flesh" Paul includes here, may start with three items that are apparently sexual, but it goes on to address issues that relate more to interpersonal relationships.

In Galatians, when Paul speaks of "the flesh," he means self-seeking human desire [that] opposes the will of God in every way.⁷ Moving past the more sexual items on Paul's list helps to show this. Paul says to avoid Idolatry, which may seem like an outdated thing, but is actually still a problem. When we put anything in the first place in our lives; the place that rightfully belongs to God, like money or our careers, we are guilty of idolatry. Sorcery is another that surely no one does any more, right? But even though we may not try to use magic, sorcery was the practice of trying to manipulate the world for one's own benefit. And today many people put their faith and trust in their own ability to control the world for their own betterment. And then Paul counts off Enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, and factions... does any of that sound familiar? If you wanted to sum up society today in seven words, those might be them.

If you stay up late watching TV you may have seen what has become a regular feature of the Jimmy Kimmel Show called "Celebrities Read Mean Tweets." Here, celebrities are invited onto the show to read the mean things that people post about them on Twitter. Jake Gyllenhaal reads one about his supposedly "punchable face." Emma Watson, sweet Hermione Granger from the Harry Potter films, reads a tweet claiming she "seems like the type of girl who I would be friends with for like 3 days and then get really sick of but not tell her."⁸ It's played for laughs and often the offended celebrity takes the opportunity to respond in kind, but it also illustrates that somehow it has become acceptable to be ugly toward one another. And it comes from every corner of society right up to the highest offices of our government and at its worst, this hatefulness seems to be used as a tool to generate hostility *against* "them" and loyalty *to* "us."

But Paul argues that we who call ourselves disciples are supposed to be better than that. We are not supposed to be sowing the bitter fruit of anger and division and selfishness. We are called to something better. So, when Paul says that Spirit is opposed to flesh and flesh is opposed to Spirit, he is arguing that our human tendency toward sin, prevents us from walking in the light of God's spirit. And walking in the

Spirit, living by the Spirit, is what disciples do. So we have to make the effort; we have to try to live in the Spirit.

Have you ever set your chair in the backyard, just to enjoy a sunny afternoon? When the weather is cool, and the sun is warm on your face; that's a good day. But the sun moves (actually, the earth turns, but you know what I mean), and that sunshine moves with it and pretty soon, you're sitting in the shade of a tree limb or your neighbor's roofline. So, you have to get up and move your chair. If you stay in your yard long enough, you'll likely have to keep moving your chair just to stay in the sunshine. That's what it's like to live in God's Spirit. You have to keep doing it, keep moving your chair, keep working to stay in the Light, even when other people are throwing shade

I say "work" because being angry, mean, resentful, and hurtful towards people who are either unintentionally or willfully ignorant and hurtful, can feel good; it can feel cathartic and powerful. But that catharsis and power just produce more bitter fruit; more fleshy sinful ugliness of which the world already has plenty.

So we work to stay in the light. And we do that by embracing the fruits of the Spirit. How do we live in the Spirit? We do Spirit things. We lead Spirit lives. The fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That is the recipe for the Christian life. And we do it day by day, moment by moment.

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 patient, it inspires patience 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. I guess you could say we are pancakes. And ultimately, what sets us, Spirit-led pancakes apart from all the other pancakes, is 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 "IHOP® History." *Welcome to IHOP*, IHOP Restaurants LLC, www.ihop.com/en/about-ihop/history.

² Matthew 7:15-20, NRSV

³ Mark 2:23-28, NRSV

⁴ Mark 7:14-23, Matthew 15:10-20, NRSV

⁵ Matthew 5:17-20, NRSV

⁶ Hays, Richard B. "Galatians." *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume XI*, Edited by Leander E. Keck, Abingdon Press, 2000, p. 325.

⁷ Hays, Richard B. "Galatians." p. 326

⁸ Jimmy Kimmel Live, Celebrities Read Mean Tweets #11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2oVUxTV4WA>