

Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:16-26 ~ February 19, 2017 ~ Heritage Lutheran Church

The fruit of the Spirit is not an apple. The fruit of the Spirit is not an apple. If you wanna be an apple, you might as well hear it, you can't be a fruit of the Spirit. Cause, the fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. The fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

I am hoping that most of you remember this repetitious little scripture song that our Sunday school children blessed us with last week. I don't know about you, but I have found myself humming bits and pieces of it all week long. So it is not a coincidence that the Biblical foundation of this song, Galatians 5:22-23, ends up smack dab in the middle of this week's sermon text. Does anyone else see the connection between our children's musical joy and the assigned Scripture of the day? Some might be inclined to say it is a happy coincidence. But, I believe it is a sign of the Spirit's leading. God's Spirit wants all of us to sit up and pay attention to the nature of the fruit he is attempting to produce in us.

With that in mind, let me ask the question, "How is fruit produced?" Is it created by an artisan in a studio? Can it be manufactured on an assembly line? Is it made through the miracle of modern chemistry? Is there an emerging technology that can produce fruit? Let's take an apple for example. How do we get apples? Well as any of our Sunday school children can tell us, we get apples from apple trees. This is a very important aspect of what St. Paul is trying to teach us in Galatians.

I was very fortunate when I lived in Decorah, Iowa to have a good friend who owed a fairly large apple orchard. On several occasions I was able to observe firsthand how apples are produced. My friend spent endless hours every year working to insure the health of each tree. He was diligent about providing adequate water, nutrients, and pest control for each tree. Healthy apple trees grow far more branches than is ideal for fruit production. So carefully pruning was an immense job. Then, in a good year, apple trees set more fruit that they can bring to full maturity. Again the orchard grower has the hard work of culling weak, undesirable, and diseased fruits to give the tree branches a chance to support its fruit while reaching maturity.

This analogy brings us to a very important point. Fruit is not made by the hands of humans. The orchard grower attends carefully to the trees. By a natural process orchestrated by God himself the tree produces fruit all on its own. Apples are produced by apple trees, not orchard growers. We need to bear this pattern carefully in our minds as we approach what Paul is teaching us in today's text.

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Walking by the Spirit is the opposite of living under the law. This is because it is our flesh that desires the law. Deep inside us is the longing to justify ourselves. We want to gratify ourselves by the expression of free will. We want to prove ourselves righteous by our own Idea of right living. But, what we fail to understand is that such legalism is the very heart of sin. It is what Paul calls "the Flesh." And so Paul teaches that:

...the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Being led by the spirit is like being an orchard grower. The trees in an orchard are not created by the grower. They grow according to their own nature, free to be what they are by God's design. The grower's role is to eliminate the things that would inhibit their natural development. Walking by the Spirit involves this same pattern. Our spiritual development is something far beyond the capability of our free will to create. This is especially true since our will is actually bound to sin and acts of the flesh. So to apply our will to spiritual development through works of the law is contrary to walking by the spirit. Instead, walking by the spirit is a matter of working to eliminate things in our lives that inhibit good spiritual health. For an orchard grower the process involves attention to soil quality, adequate moisture, the elimination of pests, pruning, and culling. Paul talks about working against acts of the flesh to promote spiritual health and the development of the fruits of the spirit. He is fairly specific in what he recommends we eliminate from our lives so that we may walk by the spirit. Here is the list of things Paul encourages us to eliminate...

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

The world wants to pretend that this list is just Christianity's way of spoiling all the fun in life. But the world does not understand the context in which Paul is teaching. Would we condemn an orchard grower who fertilizes, waters, engages in pest control, prunes, and culls his orchard for working against the orchard's natural enjoyment of itself? True, soil depletion, drought, infestation, wild grown, and over bearing are all natural phenomenon. But a farmer's hard work against them is not foolishness. It is a work of wisdom with the design of better yield and quality.

This is why the Bible encourages us to work against the acts of the flesh that Paul lists here in Galatians. Our efforts to eliminate the undisciplined natural tendencies of the flesh are not works of the law. They are simply part of walking by the Spirit. When in our right minds, listening to God's word, we learn how the acts of the flesh work to destroy us both physically and spiritually. When we fail to eliminate them we become more and more like an untended apple tree. Our lives dissipate into an increasingly chaotic state. And the natural fruit that God's Spirit desires in us withers and dies.

But when we walk by the Spirit, God leads us to depart from acts of the flesh. We learn to avoid those things which wither our spirit and corrupt our minds. These are not works of the law, because we are not seeking righteousness before God. We have all the righteousness we need in Jesus. Rather, we are seeking spiritual health. And when our spirits are healthy then together with God's Spirit they produce ***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.*** That is where a fruit of the Spirit comes from. It comes from a life that is spiritually healthy. It comes from a life that is relatively free from acts of the flesh. Like a fruit growing on the branch of a healthy apple tree, the fruits of the Spirit bud forth of their own accord. They swell and ripen until they bring the sweetness of God's kingdom into our lives.

How many of us will seriously consider putting our feet to the path along which God's Spirit seeks to guide us? How many of us have gone on weight reduction diets? How many of us have started exercise regimens? How many of us have entered courses of study designed to open new opportunities for our lives? All of these things are good in their own way. And they are all prototypes of what it means to "walk by the Spirit." But what if we were to take Paul's encouragement to heart? What if we were to dedicate ourselves to a life lead by the Holy Spirit of God? What if we took the significance of our baptisms seriously? What if we genuinely worked against the acts of the flesh, by daily drowning them in sorrow and repentance so that through Christ's cross they might be

put to death? And what if by the Holy Spirit's power we began each day as a new person rising to live before God in righteousness and purity forever? What would that be like? This is what Paul is calling us to do. This is what it means to be led by the Holy Spirit, no longer subject to the law.

And I promise you, as you work alongside the Spirit to tend to the needs of your lives you will see the coming of fruit in its season. Fruit that gives life sweetness unlike anything you have ever seen or experienced before. The fruit of the spirit can grant you a harvest that is splendid beyond your wildest imagination. Yes it is true that you are saved. Jesus has seen to that and you each have his promise of life eternal with God. But through the Holy Spirit you are offered something more. You are offered the opportunity to harvest the Fruit of the Spirit from your life now. Turn you heart toward God. Place your trust in Jesus. Take hold of the Holy Spirit's hand and let him guide you this day and every day. And as he shields you from acts of the flesh and draws you into his kingdom, the fruit will come. Yes it will come. The fruit of the Spirit is ***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.*** And I promise you it will taste wonderful beyond your wildest imagination.

The cross is full. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive and leading us out to go, make, baptize and teach disciples. Let us take up our cross and follow him.