

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14
Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Third Sunday After Pentecost
Midway Presbyterian Church
June 26, 2022

The Fruit of the Spirit

Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson

In our Old Testament Lesson for this Third Sunday after Pentecost, we hear of the end of the career of one prophet, and the beginning of the career of another. God will provide one whom the people can rally around. Listen to these words from 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14...

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

In our Epistle Lesson we find Paul urging his readers to take up the banner of freedom in Christ and to be led by the Spirit. Listen to these words from Galatians 5:1 and 13-25...

Sermon

No longer in the season of Advent and Christmas, or Lent and Easter, summer is a good time to lay the Lectionary lessons aside and do a series of sermons. For example, a series on The Ten Commandments, The Beatitudes, or The Lord's Prayer. I had pretty much decided on doing a series this summer on the "Fruit of the Spirit." Then I saw that the Lectionary Epistle Lesson for the Third Sunday after Pentecost (June 26) is Galatians 5:1 and 13-25. So my thinking was confirmed, for these verses include the apostle Paul's familiar words:

...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things (vv. 22-23).

A challenge when dealing with such well-known Bible verses is that it's easy for us to become overly-familiar with them. We've heard so much about the fruits of the Spirit that we may not take the time to meditate upon them and consider what they mean for us. The reality is

that the fruits of the Spirit are beautiful, and when they are present in our lives, it's a wonderful thing—for us and for those around us.

We all know that there is much that is evil and demeaning in the world today. Last week I read a story that in May a law was passed to stop vulgarities on vanity license plates in the state of Maine. In one of the recent Super Regional Baseball games between Tennessee and Notre Dame, one of the Tennessee players was ejected from the game for protesting a call and using vulgar language. There are politicians running for high office who routinely use profanity in speeches and rallies. In his commentary on Galatians William Barclay calls the fruits of the Spirit, “The Lovely Things.” How we need these lovely things today!

In our Epistle Lesson Paul exhorts the Galatians to stand firm in the freedom that Christ has established. This freedom enables them to belong to the Christian community without submitting to certain Jewish rituals, like circumcision.

But the Apostle points out that such freedom does not mean they have a license for self-indulgence. It rather means freedom to live in the way of Christ, in the life of the Spirit. As Jacques Ellul (zhaak el-yl), the French philosopher and theologian, writes in his *Ethics of Freedom*,

The glorious liberty of the children of God is not the happy fluttering of a butterfly from one attractive flower to another (pp. 124-125).

Paul then instructs the Galatians to

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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 (vv. 16-17).

Commenting on the word *flesh*, Professor of Bible and Chair of the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Presbyterian College, Robert Bryant, says that Paul is not using the

Greek word *sarx* derogatorily, as though human bodies are inherently evil. Rather this is often Paul's way of speaking of self-centered living as opposed to God-centered living. And the Apostle proceeds to list examples:

fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these (vv. 19b-21a).

Sadly, these vices had become a problem for the people of the church in Galatia. They were in Paul's mind a grave and immediate threat to the church.

You may remember Bill Bennett. He served as Secretary of Education for President Ronald Reagan and often made trips to schools. Well, according to Bennett, it was out of these conversations with teachers who often expressed difficulty in communicating common moral principles to diverse student bodies, that he wrote the book entitled, *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories*. And what were the virtues Bennett talked about? Well, there were ten of them:

Self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and faith.

While Bennett's list is not identical to the nine Fruits of the Spirit that Paul lists in Galatians 5, there is some overlap. And most Christians would no doubt applaud Bennett's virtues, given the moral decay that we are witnessing in our society today.

Now, even as Paul warned against the "works of the flesh," which are reflected in a host of self-centered practices, he also exhorted the Galatians to rely on the Spirit for the fruit of the Spirit—gifts that come from our relationship with Christ.

In John 15 Jesus said,

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me (v. 4).

The vine provides life and nurture; the branches provide fruit. The branch is no good if it doesn't bear fruit, and is removed. We don't ask an apple tree whether or not it wants to bloom and produce apples. Even a broken limb can bear apples. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Mt. 7:16). He expects his disciples to produce fruit, and the fruit will be the fruit of the Spirit.

Part of our fruit bearing is expressed in our love for one another. We are to love each other as Jesus loves us. (And that love will be the focus of our sermon next week.) We may not have to die for someone, as Jesus died for us, but there are other ways we can practice sacrificial love: listening, helping, encouraging, praying. Who, in particular, needs an expression of your love today or this week?

Donald Barnhouse served the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia from 1927 until his death in 1960. Dr. Barnhouse tells of a grapevine under glass in Hampton Court near London. It is about 250 years old and has but one root which is at least two feet thick. Some of the branches are 200 feet long. Because of skillful cutting and pruning, the vine produces several tons of grapes each year. Even though some of the smaller branches are 200 feet from the main stem, they bear much fruit because they are joined to the vine and allow the life of the vine to flow through them. The same is true of the true vine—Jesus Christ.

Abide in this One who lay down his life for us. But we cannot do that unless we take steps to do it. In daily prayer. In devotion and meditation. In worship and study. In witness and service. In Holy Communion. Thereby we can bear much fruit and our labors will not be in vain.

Jesus says, "I have chosen and appointed you." We are chosen! Few things in life are so wonderful as being chosen; whether chosen for a ball team, or for a promotion, or as a friend, or

as a spouse. But just think of it: we have all been chosen by no one less than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (Jn 15:16). 1 Peter declares that we are God’s chosen people, “in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (2:9b).

Now in our Old Testament Lesson about Elisha’s succession to Elijah as the leader of Israel, Episcopal Rector, Haywood Spangler, says that as the story develops, we don’t know until the end whether or not Elisha will receive the spirit that Elijah had received. Elisha himself doesn’t know, until he parts the Jordan River with the mantle of Elijah.

That uncertainty is not unlike what we experience today. “Will the cancer treatment work? Will the marriage counseling help? Will I be downsized out of a job? Will our child make it through school and into a fulfilling life? Should I join the church? Should I accept the call to office in the church?

Three times Elisha declares that he will not abandon Elijah. And when the old prophet asks what he may do for his young protégé, the answer is a request for a double portion of Elijah’s God-given gifts, meaning the primary heir’s share—the share that in the Old Testament went to the eldest son.

Then we read in 2 Kings 2:11:

As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.

So, there is no guarantee. Elisha will have to be vigilant. He must watch the chariot and the whirlwind. He must bend down and pick up the mantle. He must attempt to part the Jordan. And as it turns out Elisha’s hopes are confirmed. The experience of Elisha invites us today to make decisions and act in the midst of uncertainty.

And I would suggest that our connection to Christ—as branches to the vine—will enable us to bear good fruit and know the guidance of the Holy Spirit through uncertain times in our lives. The fruit of the Spirit is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in us. We can't bear them without a living, personal relationship with Christ. They are manifest in our lives when we seek to know him, love him, and follow him.

In his First Letter to the Church in Corinth Paul says:

So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth (1 Cor. 3:7).

In the book of Hosea God declared to ancient Israel, “From me comes your fruit” (14:8). Yes, it is God who gives the growth. But we do have a part to play: to plant, to cultivate, to water, to harvest. To stand firm in the freedom that Christ grants us and not to submit to any yoke of slavery. To live by the law of love. To reject self-centered ways. To take up the mantle of fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Thereby, do we fulfill the law and demonstrate that we belong to Christ Jesus. That he is for us, the way, the truth and the life, for time, and for all eternity.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.