

“Love Me Some Fruit”

Fruit of the Spirit, part #1

Galatians 5:16-26

I am so glad you are here today. You have a lot of other places you could be. You have demands on your life, and your time is precious. At Bellaire Community United Methodist Church, we want to make the most of this time together. We expect to be challenged. We expect to leave this building changed for the better. Most importantly, we expect people to be more in love with Jesus as a result of what God does in our hearts today. Turn to your neighbor and simply tell them, “I’m glad you’re here.” That is the truth.

Would you please pray with me? Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, we worship you this morning. You alone are worthy of our praise. We come before you as simply broken people. None of us have measured up to your perfection. Yet we know that you see us, you love us, you forgive us, and you offer us an abundant life. Help us not only to see you as you truly are, but to see ourselves the way you see us – beloved, servants of the Most High God. Teach us to commit all our ways to you, so that others may know your goodness. Jesus, we pray this in your holy name. Amen.

Last month was pastor appreciation month, and Bob and Debbie Johnson brought me a huge bag of apples. I mean, the package was so big, I almost hurt my back lifting it. The apples ended up providing great snacks for my family, apple crisp for the church potluck, and more. I am a fruit and veggie guy. Sure, I’ll take a chocolate chip cookie now and then, but really, fruit is my favorite.

Picture a nice, red, healthy apple, or perhaps another favorite fruit. Can you imagine walking through an orchard, seeing a tree glistening with low hanging

fruit, just begging you to pick one and enjoy it? What if you saw rotten, moldy fruit on the ground? Would you pick up one of those instead? Of course not. You would want what is best for you.

The next few weeks we are going to talk about the best things that God wants for us: the Fruit of the Spirit. I want to help you memorize a little scripture this morning, so I brought my guitar to teach you a quick song. This is straight out of Galatians 5:22-23.

The Fruit of the Spirit's not an apple.

The Fruit of the Spirit's not an apple

If you want to be an apple, you might as well hear it,

You can't be a Fruit of the Spirit.

'Cuz the Fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I hope you would all agree with me, those are great. Those are desirable fruit. Over the next few weeks, we are going to talk about how to get this fruit in our lives.

When the Apostle Paul wrote this passage to the Galatians, he wanted them to have this fruit, too. The Galatians were arguing whether or not all Christians had to obey the law of Moses. Specifically, some people taught that you could not be saved unless you were circumcised. That sounds like an odd argument to us today, but back then, this was a huge deal that almost split the church apart.

The Galatians were arguing about legalism. Literally, do we have to obey the letter of the law, expecting that to save us? Listen, these legalists in Galatia were Bible-reading Christians. They knew the scripture: the Ten Commandments and all of that. And they knew Jesus. They followed him; they loved him. The problem was, they were choosing fruit that wasn't ripe, and they were leading people further away from God instead of closer to God.

Paul wanted the Galatians, and all of us, to be led by the Spirit. As Paul wrote this wonderful letter, he used contrast to show people the difference between believing in the law and being led by the Spirit. Look at this list one more time, starting in verse 19. “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. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

I'm going to make a bold, complicated theological statement here: that stuff is bad. (OK, not so complicated.) But look at this list; not one piece of that rotten, sinful fruit sounds enticing to me. Paul says these things are not part of God's kingdom. If you practice them, you are essentially saying to God, “I don't want the amazing life you have for me. I'll take a belly ache of rotten fruit instead.”

As much as we sing about the good fruits of the Spirit, the fact remains that there are still people in this world who seek the rotten fruit. I do not know their reasons. It troubles me that someone would seek immorality and selfishness, or worse.

But before you label me judgmental, let me be honest. I’ve eaten some of that nasty fruit, too. It tasted sweet at first, but it ate away at my insides. I have harbored anger in my life. I have been jealous. And I bet if you and I had an honest, heart-to-heart conversation with each other, there would be forbidden fruits that both of us would admit we had sampled. Some of us might even be addicted to them right now.

There is a war going on. Look at verse 17. Paul says the acts of the sinful nature are in conflict with the Spirit. You and I have to decide, whose side are we on? No wonder this stuff is messing us up. No wonder our stomachs ache. The battle for our souls is at hand.

We need some good news. Try Romans 8:1-2. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” Paul reiterates this truth in Galatians 5:1. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”

With Jesus’ help, we can choose the good fruit. We can choose love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. If nine is too many to remember, how about just two? Love and joy. That’s fruit I’m hungry for. So how do we get those?

First, we have to admit that we alone cannot free ourselves from sin and death. It is Christ who died to set us free. Paul says in verse 24, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” We have to belong to Jesus first before we can claim the good fruit. Christ died because he loves us. So when we claim him as Lord and Savior, we can enter into a loving relationship with him that bears love as a result. We can become fruit

trees. Listen to what Jesus promised. John 15:5 - “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit...” Again, John 15:16 – “I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.” And if that is not clear enough, verse 17 is your bonus. John 15:17 – “This is my command: Love each other.”

Can it be any clearer? We do not have to choose the rotten fruit that upsets our stomachs and our lives. We can choose Jesus. We can choose the Holy Spirit. Choose your favorite tree; Jesus will cultivate you! Be an apple, cherry, lemon, lime, peach, nectarine, cumquat, dragon fruit....Heck, be a watermelon tree! You know how little children say if you swallow a watermelon seed, a watermelon tree will grow inside you? There’s a spiritual application!

When we respond to Jesus instead of focusing on legalism, selfishness, and sin, we produce the fruit God wants in our lives. Love, joy, peace. Isn’t it interesting that for many people, their favorite chapter on the Bible is 1st Corinthians 13? “Love is patient, love is kind...” Do you know what that is? Fruit of the Spirit! Exactly!

When we produce that fruit, others enjoy it! Think of it. When you are loving and kind to your neighbor, instead of bitter and envious, they get to enjoy that fruit, too! When you are joyful and not pessimistic, when you choose to smile and not frown, when you simply decide, “This is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice!” (Psalm 118:24), everyone around you is glad! Everyone gets to enjoy that fruit.

Today is All Saints Sunday. This is chance to remember the fruit of others who have gone on before us. What legacy did they leave us? What fruit did they produce that we still enjoy and cultivate in our lives? I realize that perhaps the

way we celebrate this holy day is not traditional: we include a lot of names on our list who were not members of this church or any church. Some of them quite possibly did not follow Jesus. That's OK. God can use anyone, anywhere, to produce fruit in our lives. As we remember them today, we are left with a very important question: will I leave a legacy of the Fruit of the Spirit to my family, to my friends, and to my church? Will I choose love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Will others enjoy the fruit the Spirit produces in my life? Ponder those questions. Then go and produce fruit that others can enjoy. Amen.

(continue with Holy Communion liturgy, using the All Saints pattern from the Book of Worship.)

Memory verse

Galatians 5:22-23

"...The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Reflection questions

1. Be honest. What stinky fruit have you produced in your life? Would you confess right now to Jesus and ask him to take it away?
2. What factions occur in your life, family, and/or church? What produces them?
3. What fruit of the Spirit sounds good to you? What fruit is the strongest in your life? What is the weakest?
4. Pray that the Holy Spirit would produce fruit in your life that pleases God.