

Sunday, July 16, 2017

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Luke 9:51-62

Matthew 62:33-49

Growing the Good Fruit –Love

It is growing season in Southwestern Ontario and many of us have planted bulbs, seeds, young plants and now are watching and waiting to see what will happen to what has been gently placed in the ground, covered with soil, nurtured with water and heat from the sun. What will be the outcome? Our hope is that the bulbs, seeds and young plants will have a high yield—of fruit or flower, of colour for enjoyment or sweet and good tasting vegetables and of course-fruit. We also know that in order to reap the harvest of what was planted, there is a need for work to be done prior to the seeding, during the growing season and of course when the harvest time comes.

Our focus for the summer is of a different kind of fruit—the fruit of the Spirit as Paul described in his letter to the Galatians. But what is Paul teaching the young church at Galatia? To understand this, we need to look not only on the key verses of 22-23, we must also read what one might consider the polar opposites. This is a common writing technique of Paul—listing both negatives and positives, in order that the meaning may be sharpened. Paul describes in verse 19-21 what he calls the acts of sinful nature or what has been called the works or sins of the flesh. And he states—these acts of the sinful nature 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. Paul then gives warning- if you live like this you will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul describes two lists of characteristics that individuals might have. There is the list of the one we do not want and the one we do want. The main difference between them is their source. The acts of the flesh is a set of outcomes of the power of the flesh. Whereas the fruit of the Spirit comes from the Spirit of God within an individual. All of the items of both lists are characteristics= they are not doing words but are being words. These characteristics for the most part are also relational but in these relationships, there needs to be care and concern feelings and thoughts which lead us to grow. For example, love of course is nothing unless it is extended toward others specifically people whom we care about.. How we love others is key to living by the guidance of the Spirit.

Throughout the summer we will focus on one or two of these characteristics and explore what Paul had in mind when he stated that they are the ‘fruit of the Spirit’. We will also consider

the focus of the fruit of the Spirit and how the implications of these characteristics appeal to our Christian thinking and practise. What does it mean to have peace, and be patient?

Our focus today is on love. Yes we all love food, reading a book, watching a favourite movie and listening to music but this is not the kind of love Paul refers to. He is referring to love in relationship with other people. And we know that Paul knows what love is for he also wrote that passage which is often shared at both weddings and funerals. I Cor 13—the words of which we shall sing as our hymn in a few minutes.. If we don't have love Paul says we are nothing. Even if we give all our possessions to the poor and boast about our lives we will gain nothing if we don't have love. Love is many things to many people and of course there have been many poems, books, stories movies about love. But to truly describe it means to experience it in relationship with another person.

Jesus taught his followers what was required of them so that they would inherit the kingdom of God. In John 13:34 he also gave to them and to us who follow his teachings a new command. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. He commanded all to love others but he also knew that loving everyone is difficult. But He also got frustrated with his faithful followers who did not see the importance of sharing and showing love.

In our reading from Luke 9 Jesus called to some people and said, "Follow me." Instead of dropping what they were doing, they spoke to Jesus and said. "I will follow, but first let me go and bury my father." We do not know whether the person's father had recently died, or whether the person wanted to live with his father until the time of his death. All we do know is that Jesus told him that the dead would bury themselves it was more urgent that to show love for others, means that we need to tell others of the kingdom of God, for this is an act of love.

How are we to love others? There are many ways to share and show love and we do this—as married couples—husbands, wives; as parents to children, as children to adults. It could be in the everyday tasks that get done—dishes, laundry, cleaning, or in the special moments that are shared together as well as in the moments that are remembered if death has occurred. Love never ends but always continues in what is said or done.

In Matthew 25 Jesus describes those who are blessed by God and who will receive the kingdom of heaven. Those who love share it in feeding others, inviting the stranger in, giving food and drink, visiting the sick and those who are imprisoned as well as loving others when prayers are offered on behalf of others. We love because Christ taught us that this is how we are to love. But what happens if we do not love others? We are not received into God's heavenly kingdom while others receive eternal life.

But what does it mean to love?

here was once a bridge which spanned a large river. During most of the day the bridge sat with its length running up and down the river paralleled with the banks, allowing ships to pass thru freely on both sides of the bridge. But at certain times each day, a train would come along and the bridge would be turned sideways across the river, allowing a train to cross it.

A switchman sat in a small shack on one side of the river where he operated the controls to turn the bridge and lock it into place as the train crossed. One evening as the switchman was waiting for the last train of the day to come, he looked off into the distance thru the dimming twilight and caught sight of the trainlights. He stepped to the control and waited until the train was within a prescribed distance when he was to turn the bridge. He turned the bridge into position, but, to his horror, he found the locking control did not work. If the bridge was not securely in position it would wobble back and forth at the ends when the train came onto it, causing the train to jump the track and go crashing into the river. This would be a passenger train with many people aboard. He left the bridge turned across the river, and hurried across the bridge to the other side of the river where there was a lever switch he could hold to operate the lock manually. He would have to hold the lever back firmly as the train crossed. He could hear the rumble of the train now, and he took hold of the lever and leaned backward to apply his weight to it, locking the bridge. He kept applying the pressure to keep the mechanism locked. Many lives depended on this man's strength.

Then, coming across the bridge from the direction of his control shack, he heard a sound that made his blood run cold. "Daddy, where are you?" His four-year-old son was crossing the bridge to look for him. His first impulse was to cry out to the child, "Run! Run!" But the train was too close; the tiny legs would never make it across the bridge in time. The man almost left his lever to run and snatch up his son and carry him to safety. But he realized that he could not get back to the lever. Either the people on the train or his little son must die. He took a moment to make his decision.

The train sped safely and swiftly on its way, and no one aboard was even aware of the tiny broken body thrown mercilessly into the river by the onrushing train. Nor were they aware of the pitiful figure of the sobbing man, still clinging tightly to the locking lever long after the train had passed. They did not see him walking home more slowly than he had ever walked: to tell his wife how their son had brutally died.

Just think about this man and the love he had for his child, the sacrifice he made for the train load of people who did not even know what was happening. Love—for strangers at what cost?.

Now think about God the Father when he sent Jesus to teach us how to love, how Jesus got frustrated when people did not understand and how he gave of himself for us out of love. God's Son, Jesus, bridged the gap between us and eternal life. How deep is God's love for you? How much do you love God and how do you offer thanks? You can give thanks as you share and show your love in all the relationships you have—spouses, children, friends, This is one way of growing stronger in faith, loving others as the Spirit calls you and as Jesus taught.

Are you willing to do grow this good fruit? Love one another as I have loved you.

Holy God, we praise you for your teachings of the Spirit and how we may stronger and be more willing to share and show love with those with whom we are in relationship—family, friends, and church family. Enable us to love as you have always loved us. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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