

Proper 8 Year C

6/26/2022

1 Kings 19:15-16,19-21; Psalm 16; Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

Rev. Mark A. Lafler

Last week, Deacon Bob in his sermon, gave a background to the letter of St. Paul to the Galatians.

Galatians is believed to be Paul's earliest letter... as Deacon Bob noted. And the letter was in part a response to an early heresy known by its supporters as Judaizers who wanted Christian converts to become Jewish before they became followers of Jesus.

Our reading today comes from the second half of the book.

It is a well-known portion of scripture where St. Paul compares the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.

Both lists... the bad one and the good one are both *ad hoc*.

In other words, they are lists that serve the purposes of the letter.

They are not all-inclusive lists of all that is bad and all that is good.

They more or less proclaim: here are some examples of what the flesh will do...

And here are some examples of how the Spirit will bring fruit in your life...

There are three enemies of our Christian life:

The world, the flesh, and the Satan.

St. Paul is focused here on our enemy known as the flesh.

To quote Walt Kelly:

We have met the enemy and he is us

The works of the flesh are the things that come naturally...

The actions we might do in order to please ourselves.

The ultimate sin... the pleasing of our own person.

In other words... self-autonomy...

putting our own pleasures, needs, wants above others...

It's quite a list that St. Paul has put together:

*fornication, impurity, idolatry, sorcery, jealousy, anger, drunkenness,
things like these.*

Not only is it the stuff of TV and movies...

Which can make those things exciting...

Unfortunately, it is the stuff of much of our culture.

All of these actions, of course, we should avoid...

And when we do fall to them...

We would be wise to obey our Baptism Covenant that says with God's help we will repent and return to the Lord (BCP, 304).

Now the fruit of the Spirit is a much different list...

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...

They are the fruit of a life in the Spirit.

The more we yield to the Spirit's work in our life...

The more fruit will be produced.

As Baptized Christians we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever (BCP, 308).

But that certainly doesn't make us perfect...

The more we yield to the Spirit to transform our life...

In theological terms this is called sanctification...

The more we yield, the more fruit will be present in our life.

Whereas the works of the flesh produces bondage...

We actually lose our liberty when we sin... (BCP, 849)

The fruit of the Spirit is an outflow of freedom.

This is why St. Paul starts our whole reading talking about freedom.

He says:

For freedom Christ has set us free.

Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters;

*only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence,
but through love become slaves to one another.*

For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment,

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

This talk of freedom precedes the comparison of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.

The works and fruit are both tied to our freedom and as it pertains to how we love the people around us.

This is where the idea and concept of freedom is different in the Biblical understanding as it is in our cultural and national understanding.

As Americans we mostly view freedom in the form of our rights...

In the notion of being able to do what I want to do when I want to do it.

And if we hear freedom with that understanding we are going to fail to understand what Christ Jesus is saying to the church through St. Paul.

Pastor Rich Villodas recently tweeted:

...American freedom says, “my freedom is mine to enjoy.”

Christian freedom says “my freedom is for the purpose of serving my neighbor.”

Our freedom in Christ is for the purpose of glorifying God and loving the people around us.

Therefore, the fruit of the Spirit...

The love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...

Is freedom to serve others.

Now... I want to talk about two of these fruit in particular.

I will save the second one for next week...

But I will say that they both start with the letter “g.”

Today’s fruit is generosity.

Now, I don’t know about you, but when I was in Sunday School...

Generosity was not on this list.

I learned that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness...

And when I checked this week on the translations the vast majority (we are talking over 90%) of them translate the Greek word as goodness.

So why does our NRSV text translate it as generosity?

Well, when I did more research on the word...

Agathōsuná is the Greek word.

It means good... which is its root...

But this particular word stresses the kindly side of goodness as opposed to the righteous side of goodness.

So, what does that mean?

It means the stress of the word is on how one is good to another person and less on good as a righteous quality.

So, how is someone good to another person?

Well, whatever way we are good to others... it is a form of generosity.

And thus, our translation here in our text.

So the fruit of the Spirit includes generosity.

Generosity is often equated with a person's financial means that they give to others or to organizations.

And it certainly applies here too.

To be good to other people is also to be generous in helping people financially when the need is there.

I recently read a story about General Charles Gordon (1833-1885) who in the 19th century served Queen Victoria in China and elsewhere.

But when General Gordon was living in England, he'd give away 90 percent of his income.

When he heard about a famine in Lancashire, he scratched off the inscription from a pure gold medal he'd received from a world leader and sent it up north, saying they should melt it down and use the money to buy bread for the poor.

That day he wrote in his diary: "The last earthly thing I had in this world that I valued I have given to the Lord Jesus."

An inspiring story...

Perhaps we will never match this level of generosity, but God does call all of us to look out for those in need.

A person can also be generous with their time.

Perhaps its listening to someone who just needs to vent, to talk through their thoughts and feelings...

Perhaps its being generous with serving someone who is not able to do what they need to do... So you help them complete their project.

Generous with your time at church.

Generous with your time in the community.

We can be generous by using our talents to help people in all sorts of things...

People that are gifted with technology helping others that are weak in that area.

People that are gifted with budgets and accounting helping others out.

People that are skilled with construction know how... or people skills...

Serving others...

Serving the church...

We can be generous with our time and talents in so many ways.

And the goodness of generosity comes not just because it's the right thing to do...

The Holy Spirit leads us into generosity because it reflects the nature of God.

God is the author of generosity.

Listen to St. Paul's words in Philippians 2.

He writes:

Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

It is the generosity of Jesus Christ on the cross...

The riches of his grace and mercy (see Ephesians 2.1-10)...

That we can become children of God.

The generosity of Jesus dying on the cross for us.

To redeem us from sin and death.

Is the epitome and essence of generosity.

And it is from that generosity through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us...

That produces the fruit of generosity.

The goodness and generosity we show to our neighbors through our time, talents, and the giving of our finances...
Comes from God who is generous towards us.

So, as we pray in our prayers...
Come Holy Spirit...
Who is the bringer of fruit in our lives...
May the Spirit of God quicken in us an attitude of generosity...
The fruit of the Spirit...

That we may...
Even in the difficult times we live in...
Especially regarding the conversations that are going on today.
In the differences of viewpoints and how we debate the best ways to value life in this world...
May we still exude the fruit of the Spirit in generosity.

That is our calling...
being generous in word and deed.
May the Spirit work in us a generous heart that flows from the generosity of God.

Amen.