

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – LOVE
THE SPIRIT OF RELATIONSHIP
“DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU”
John 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 13

The fruit of the Spirit we are exploring is the fruit of love. Last week we talked about how the Holy Spirit is in relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. We saw, by allowing ourselves to be mirrors of the relationship within the Trinity, we become Ambassadors for Christ. We become people of God interested in mutual, equal, intentional relationships of open communication and unified desire. This week I want to explore more deeply what love looks like.

Let's return to Galatians 5:22 for a moment.

There is an interesting language quirk in our foundation verse.

The verse does not read, “*The fruits of the spirit are...*”

Instead, it says, “*The **fruit** of the Spirit is...*”

Paul uses a singular designation for this, not a plural designation.

Just before this he talks about the “works of the flesh” and those are plural. But this list is singular.

We can read this list of fruits as one thing:

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

They are all one thing together.

Or we can read the first fruit of the list as the one thing and all the others are characteristics of that one thing.

In other words, *the fruit of the Spirit is love* and then we would add the phrase “*which is characterized*” by: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. For our purposes today, let us say *the fruit of the Spirit is love* and the rest of the list is a characterization of what love is like.

In the first 400 years of the church, discussions about the Holy Spirit were very heated and passionate. The great thinkers upon Scripture and leaders of the church were trying to figure out what and who the Holy Spirit was and why she appears in Scripture.

Is she lesser than God and Christ?

Is she a separate entity?

Is she an expression of an aspect of God?

Or is she a person of the essential nature of God, like Jesus Christ?

If so, is she created or is she co-eternal with God?

For various reasons, which are not germane to our discussion today, the Holy Spirit was recognized as a formal and full person of God, thereby leading to the crystallization of the Trinity.

At the center of those discussions was St. Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine (Auggie, I like to call him) was the preeminent thinker of the early church and probably the most influential thinker of the faith since Paul himself.

Augustine affirmed strongly the idea of the Trinity and the eternal personhood of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Auggie said a lot of things and wrote many, many books, commentaries, sermons and tracts regarding the faith. These heavily influenced the nature of Western Christianity.

One of Auggie's ideas about the Holy Spirit was this:

Because the Holy Spirit flows from Christ as a gift from God, because the Holy Spirit *proceeds from* God and Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit can only be

the mutual love between Father and Son.

This is why I am saying the fruit of the Spirit is love and the rest of the things in Paul's list simply characterize love.

The Holy Spirit, then, IS the love between God and Christ.

By being sent out and breathed out by Christ upon the disciples and upon us, we participate in the love between God and Christ.

This is what is meant by *receiving the Holy Spirit.*

This Spirit-filled love is a big deal for Paul, just as it is for Jesus. There are many things people say the Christian faith is and many ways to talk about what Jesus Christ did and does, but the core of it all is very simple:

Christian faith is experiencing, learning about and seeking the love of God. We know what the love of God looks like by looking to the life and work of Jesus Christ. We believe and do the things we do as Christians because the Holy Spirit gives us opportunities and situations to participate and enact that love wherever we are able.

Love experienced, love done and love practiced is what the faith is all about.

That is what Paul is telling the crazy, messed-up church of Corinth when he tells them the most excellent way, the way of Love in 1 Corinthians 13. In 13:4, we have another list, just like our list in Galatians 5. Here Paul says:

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; love is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; love is not irritable or resentful; love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13 is the pinnacle of a whole discussion about the nature of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit and how those gifts enact in a community.

This verse helps us understand how the Holy Spirit is with us in our relationships.

Remember what Auggie said,
The Holy Spirit IS the mutual love between God the Father and Jesus Christ.

So when we read these verses from Paul we can transpose words so we can truly understand what is being said here. In 1 Cor 13 we are talking about the nature of God in God's total being, and that nature is and always lovingkindness and mercy.

We can take any one of the persons of the Trinity and transpose them to 1 Cor 13.

God the Father is patient and kind; God the Father does not envy or boast; he is not arrogant or rude...

Jesus Christ is not arrogant or rude. He does not insist on his own way...

The Holy Spirit is patient and kind...She is not irritable or resentful...she rejoices in the truth. The Holy Spirit bears all things, she believes all things.

Do you see what Paul is doing here?

He is seeking a total and complete transformation of the church and the people of Corinth by getting them to identify themselves directly with the Holy Spirit, with that mutual love between Father and Son. When we are participating in the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of love, we are being incorporated and coming into communion with God.

Everything changes when we remain and abide in Christ's all-encompassing love. The Holy Spirit gives us the power and strength to abide in the love of God.

And everything is transformed as a result.

Paul puts it in the most poetic words a couple of chapters later in 1 Corinthians. He says,

“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be transformed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall all be transformed” (1 Cor 15:51-52)”.

We are called to be change, to be transformation, for the sake of love. Paul is essentially saying to the church at Corinth,

love one another and in doing so, the Holy Spirit will transform you now and in the future. In fact, you have already been transformed by your relationship to Jesus Christ. Seek to transform your community in the same way you were transformed.

Whenever I read these verses about transformation, I think of my friend Joe. Joe used to come to my spiritual direction meeting with ex-cons every week. Joe was about 63 years old when I met him. He lived in Minneapolis with his wife of about 30 years.

Joe wasn't from Minneapolis. He was from Texas. He grew up on the streets in the city and ran with a bad crowd. One of the things he used to tell us in our group was how much it hurt to think about what his mother thought of him.

He would say this because she, a strong Christian woman, loved him no matter what and made sure he knew that love. He would also say it hurt because he knew how disappointed his mother was in him.

Joe was a bank robber. He did well as a bank robber, which is unusual, since most don't do well at all. He had knocked over a lot of banks in Texas. I asked him once what his biggest haul was and he told me it was in excess of \$275,000.

But his last robbery in Dallas went horribly wrong. The timing was all wrong and before he knew it, the bank was surrounded.

The robbery turned into a hostage situation.

A hostage situation turned into a gun fight.

The gun fight turned into a dead cop.

And the whole thing turned into a life sentence for Joe in the Texas Maximum Security prison.

After a couple years in prison, Joe began to consider his mother and began to read his Bible again. He saw things in there he hadn't seen before –

things about God's love and mercy and forgiveness.

Soon after that, he started receiving letters from a woman who was part of a pen pal program for lifers. By letter, Joe and this woman fell in love. They were married a few years later in prison.

By some miracle of grace, leniency and legal wrangling, this woman, Joe's wife, was able to get him released after 8 years of incarceration. She was from Minneapolis.

Joe's life was transformed. The man who went into prison – a street thug who robbed banks and killed a police officer – was not the man who left prison. The man who left prison was given the longest parole in the history of Texas and Minnesota – 23 years. Joe made every single one of his parole meetings. Joe was never arrested again. He never even got a speeding ticket. His marriage thrived and he thrived.

When I think of the power of love and the meaning of transformation I think of Joe. In our spiritual direction group, he was the voice of wisdom. When one of the younger guys was becoming intractable or self-assured or essentially being unloving toward himself or others, I would turn to Joe and say,

“Joe, lay some wisdom down for us on this.”

And Joe would.

Joe became a beautiful, loving, kind, joyful, gentle, peaceful, patient, self-controlled man of faith. He would attribute all this to God and the love God had shown him through his wife.

In many ways, Joe was lucky. Transformation and the power of love are pretty easy to spot when the trajectory is as extreme as Joe's path. Joe had clear markers of how love was changing him –

in prison, out of prison;

unlovable and unloved, loved and loving;

unrepentant and violent, repentant and peaceful.

He always pointed to his wedding day in prison. That was the moment he realized he could be loved and he could love. The old ways no longer applied.

He was a new man.

He had become the new wine Christ speaks of in Matthew 9 and Joe knew he could never be poured back into the old wineskin of his former life.

Love transformed Joe.

Love transforms us.

The Holy Spirit does this for and with us.

In our Gospel reading, there is a wedding at Cana. Jesus was invited to the celebration. An incredible disaster of reputation emerged. The groom did not plan correctly and the caterers ran out of wine. For this to happen was an insult to the bride's family and an indicator of future behavior on the groom's part. Jesus' mom, Mary, tells Jesus what is happening. They argue a little bit, as mothers and sons often do, then Mary tells the server,

“Do whatever he tells you.”

Do whatever Jesus tells you to do.

What does Jesus tell us?

“Love one another.”

Are we doing what Jesus tells us?

In our story, Jesus has the servants fill six water jars with water. When the servant takes some of the water to the master of the feast, the water has been turned into wine. Not just any wine, but the very best wine, the wine that is normally served first, the wine that tastes best, has been saved for last. And not just some wine, but about 180 gallons of it.

The best is yet to come.

The best is the result of a great transformation in the midst of a great celebration.

Jesus has transformed water into wine.

“Do whatever he tells you.”

This is why Paul is so focused on love, because love is what Jesus tells us to do. Love is the mutual relationship between Jesus and God, and it is exactly that love who is the Holy Spirit.

Her love, the love of God and Christ, transforms everything, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

This is why the first fruit of the Spirit is love.

Bank robbers become loving and caring husbands, friends and citizens.

Churches become communities of hope and faith.

Everyday people become participants in the mutual love shared between God and Jesus Christ.

We are people of the Holy Spirit and become ourselves vehicles of transformation in our world and in our relationships.

The way of the Holy Spirit is doing what Jesus Christ tells us to do. She, the Holy Spirit, is the one who gives us the faith and ability to believe transformation is possible through love.

This is true faith, is it not?

So much in our world indicates that transformation through love is not possible, is not happening and cannot happen.

And yet the resurrected Christ sends us the Holy Spirit and calls us to do whatever Christ tells us to do.

“Love one another”.

It is the singular fruit of the Spirit.

The rest of our discussion for the summer will be commentary on this one fruit. Love.

Let us pray:

Holy Spirit, you are the gift from Christ and God to us. You transform our lives into works of light and hope. You change us into people of God. May the fruit of your Spirit be upon us and may our transformation be visible to us in this life. Let us see where we have been and let us see what Christ has done for us, in such a way that our whole being is transformed into a reflection of the love shared between God and Jesus Christ, for you, Spirit, are this love. May it be with us as it is with God and may we always be ready to do whatever it is Christ would have us do, through the grace, mercy and love of God. In His name, we pray. Amen.