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112512 Holy Spirit Review “Living By The Fruit of the Holy Spirit” ©

Galatians 5:22-23; John 14:25-31

We began our series on the Fruits of the Holy Spirit six months ago at the beginning of June and it has taken us all the way through the Pentecost season. Next weekend, we begin the season of Advent. My prayer and hope is that our exploration of the Holy Spirit will influence how we understand the seasons of the church. What I mean by that is that I hope we begin to internalize and accept a little more what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. “Follower” may not be the right term, however, for a Spirit-filled life in Christ.

When we are simply followers, we do a couple things in our minds, particular in our day and age. First, we make the person we are following an “Other”. We *are not* the person we are following. This creates all kinds of power issues, limiting the personal growth of the person following and allowing the person being followed to increase their power over others. We see this in politicians, in cult leaders and even in ministry all the time. “To follow” often becomes an excuse to “let someone else” do the work. The other advantage to making the one followed an “Other” is that, when they crash and burn we can say to our friends and family and all who will listen, “Well, thank God it wasn’t me and I am not like them”.

Second, we distance ourselves from being in a relationship with the one who is now “Other”. This lets us intellectualize and psychologize our relationship to the one we follow. They become a blank slate upon which we can project whatever we want. The one we follow becomes like our father who never listened to us and never gave us what we wanted. He or she becomes like our mother who never affirmed our deepest needs and desires. He or she becomes like that friend who betrayed you so spectacularly back in high school. He or she becomes like the God who never fulfills any of the promises you want Him to fulfill. In the distance we create in the relationship, we fill up the empty space with ourselves.

The Holy Spirit calls us to something even deeper than what we conceive of as ‘following’. She gives us fruits and gifts to overcome the human desire to make others “other” and to distance ourselves in relationships spiritual and personal. In this possibility of a relationship of equality and closeness, the traditional American Protestant, with the backing of many centuries of good, faithful, Reformation scholarship, willingly puts up a hard, impenetrable wall. “*You*”, the theologians of our great tradition have said, “*will never and never can be like your Savior, Jesus Christ. You*”, they say, “*are so sunk into the sin and degradation of your fallen nature that you can never bridge the gap between you and God*”. And insofar as we have no real spiritual power regarding our own salvation, this is true. But it is categorically wrong after the fact. By that I mean, once we have accepted Christ in our lives, once we have committed to being a servant of God, things are supposed to change dramatically within us.

The idea is a little frightening, isn’t it? In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, this is called *theosis*. The translation is simply, *the transformation into a god*, or *being God-like*. In John 10, Jesus says to the Pharisees, *Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’?* (Jesus is quoting Psalm 82:6 and also referring to God’s statement about humankind’s creation in Genesis 1:26). *If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’ -- and Scripture cannot be annulled -- can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’?* To paraphrase, Jesus is saying, *You would condemn me for saying of myself what God has already said about*

you?

So our reception of the Holy Spirit, the giving of the breath of life by way of the Holy Spirit, is specifically intended to transform us into Christ-like beings. This is heady, mystical stuff. Things are happening here in the fruits of the Holy Spirit that are beyond understanding. We look at our lives, many of us - OK, I will personalize -- I look at my life and do not see much that resembles my becoming like Christ. Sure, I am a minister in the church of Jesus Christ. Yeah, I pray and read Scripture. But even so, I consider myself spiritually lazy. I sometimes talk about people in negative ways. I don't look for the Christ in others, especially in those who trouble me. Sometimes, it seems to take so much less energy to just give into the normalcy of what I have done before than to take the risk of making a decision for what I have already been given by Jesus Christ in these fruits of the Holy Spirit. Have I ever mentioned that I sometimes entertain the fantasy of committing the perfect bank heist?

How in the world do we do respond to Paul's admonition to the Ephesians, when he says, *That is not the way you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to **clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*** (Eph 4:20-24).

Did you catch the ending of that statement? Be renewed, transformed, molded in mind and spirit, clothe yourself into the new self, a self which is created in accordance, in the form of, *like*, God. This is the great mystery Paul speaks of in Romans. He wonders about a disturbing paradox you may be wondering about right now. That is the presenting paradox which points out to us that the life we are leading is nothing like the life we have accepted. Why, if the work of the Holy Spirit is to transform me into a Christ-like being in accordance to the image of God, am I still behaving like the spiritual child I was before I took on the responsibilities of my Christian commitment? Paul says, *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do* (Rom 7:15-19). Paul comes to an interesting conclusion, and a telling one: *So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand...Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thank be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Rom 7:21,24).

Our only hope, our only consolation, is to place absolute trust and faith, contrary to all external perception, that God is indeed doing what God said he would do - transform us into beings that resemble Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So I believe, after all these weeks of exploring how the Holy Spirit is with and among us, that what the fruit of the Holy Spirit does is provide us markers and guardrails in knowing that Christ is with us. These markers and guardrails lead us along a pathway which is defined by a deepening awareness of the love of God for each of us and all of Creation.

When I lived in Cambridge, England, there were some mornings I would wake up to the entire town shrouded in a thick, thick fog. I know that happens here as well, but what made it profound in Cambridge was the ancientness of the area. As I walked down the street, the round Norman church built in 1075 would emerge out of the fog, then disappear again. The old Kings College cathedral would arise clear

and solid, only to be consumed again by the ghostly fog. Hedges and trees in gardens hundreds of years old would blink in and out of existence. They were testimonies to an ancient and real history which undergirded and gave meaning to what was apparent in broad daylight. In the fog, the suggestion was much stronger than what was apparent in the daylight, however, was completely dependent on a much stronger, much more mysterious, reality which supported everything.

The markers of the Holy Spirit are like those ancient buildings and plantings emerging from the fog. They give a sense, a faith, in the deeper reality which supports us.

*The spirit of life emerges in the fruit of Joy.* This is Jesus' promise to the disciples before he leaves. The promise of the giving of the Holy Spirit is the presence of peace and joy. We know we are becoming like Christ when we get a glimpse of joy in our lives and in the world.

*The spirit of prayer emerges in the fruit of peace.* Jesus gives us the peace of God, like a shepherd, whose rod and staff comfort us. The marker of the fruit of peace is what brings us to a state of prayer, whereby we seek to honor God in who God is, to confess those places in our lives where we have fallen away from being the image of God in the world, to give thanks for all we have, all we are and who we are becoming in Christ and to ask for the well-being of others and ourselves.

*The spirit of discernment emerges in the fruit of patience.* Our ability to discern what the Holy Spirit is calling us to do requires us to wait patiently for the seeds in good soil to rise up in their time. God's timing is not ours. The Holy Spirit, in *her wisdom*, not ours, calls us to be patient in order that we might discern well the call of God upon us.

*The spirit of care emerges in the fruit of kindness.* Jesus says, *I have felt my power go away from me* when a woman who is in need of healing touches his clothes. In her fear of retribution, in her fear of recrimination, Jesus instead responds with kindness, saying, *Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease* (Mk 6:25-34).

*The spirit of mercy emerges in the fruit of goodness.* We share in the words of God to Jesus, *You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.* In baptism, we are welcomed into the life of mercy the Lord has provided for us and in so we share in the goodness of Creation itself. The Holy Spirit guides us into seeing the fruit of goodness in the created world, in others and, perhaps most difficult, ourselves.

*The spirit of speech emerges in the fruit of faithfulness.* The Holy Spirit has been given to us, according to the promise of Jesus, so we will testify on Jesus' behalf when we are called to speak for our faith. (John 15:26, various). Do our words speak to our faith? Does our faith reflect the way of Christ? Do people see Christ in what we say to one another and for one another? Do we trust the Holy Spirit will speak on God's behalf through us?

*The spirit of healing emerges from the fruit of gentleness.* Like the Gerasene Demoniac (Luke 8, Mark 5, Matthew), we are being healed, clothed and set into our right minds by the presence of Jesus Christ. When we are gentle with others and with ourselves, the power of healing begins to spread. When we are in need of healing, gentleness is the fruit which will guide us. This the marker of the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit.

*And the spirit of freedom is emerging in the fruit of self-control. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17).* The marker of the Holy Spirit is the emerging freedom of all peoples, creatures and creation from the pressures and destruction of tyranny, oppression and slavery. The fruit of self-control is in service to the freedom of God.

These are the fruits of the Spirit and these are the markers for us in our becoming like Christ, our *theosis*. If you remember, all these fruits of the Spirit are completely dependent on the first fruit, the fruit of love. It is *the fruit of love that calls us into a deeper relationship with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit*. It is in perfect love that fear is driven out, that equality is given precedence and all are welcomed and included in the relationship we share through our baptism into Jesus Christ.

The frightening thing is, when all this is complete, that moment when we will *see face to face and know fully as we have been fully known* (1 Cor 13), we will see ourselves as full and equal participants in the creative work of the Trinity. In that future point, the Holy Spirit will show us that she has all along been the power and the force which has lived within us and given us the strength to reach out to others in the love of God, which looks like the life of Jesus Christ, which looks like the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

May it be so for each of us, in Christ's holy name. Amen.