

Are We Tending to our Fruits?

Scripture: John 15:1 – 17 and Galatians 5:22 – 26

10/24/21

What is your favorite fruit? Is it an apple, an orange, or a banana? While in the country of India a few years ago, I loved going out behind our kitchen to pick a fresh mango or banana right off the trees. What is your favorite fruit?

Have you tried these spiritual fruits – love, joy, peace, kindness, patience, faithfulness, gentleness, generosity, and self-control? Today's question for my message is – 'Are We Tending to our Fruits?'

When I look at our first scripture reading from the Gospel of John, I think of a quote I heard in seminary – 'Indeed, the Bible does not offer individual response or solutions to society's problems, but instead the Bible offers social responses and solutions!'

Think of that idea - 'the Bible does not offer individual response or solutions to society's problems, but instead the Bible offers social responses and solutions!'

For us as Christians, when we journey on the way of life with Jesus in our heart, we must realize that scripture teaches us that we are not alone on this journey. It is not an individual process, but a collective process. My future is inherently tied to your future. I am grafted onto the same vine as you are grafted. We cannot bear without each other!

Jesus is telling us that we must be different. We are not just individuals but we are a collective and God has a purpose for us collectively! We are to bear 'fruit'.

Each of us are part of a plant and each of us has a role to play. Without the roots to nourish the plant, the fruit will not grow. Without a sturdy stem to support the plant, the fruit will not grow.

Each of us must work together to collectively bear fruit, not only for a short single growing season, but over a lifetime after lifetime!

The Holy Spirit produces fruit inside each and every believer of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, not all Christians seem to realize this fact!

Inside each and every one of us are the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, many of us do not realize this fact!

I would go as far to say to you all - look at all the fruits in here!

As we grow in faith, we need to pay attention to the fruit within us. We should tend to our harvest by developing these character traits in such a way that they can serve as an example others can follow.

The seed at the core of an apple is responsible for the reproduction of another tree which in turn produces more apples. When one brother or sister in Christ shares the fruit of the Holy Spirit with another it helps develop the fruit inside the Spirit of the receiving believer, thus producing more fruit.

In Feb. 2020, as the Covid 19 crisis was just beginning, I was willing to self-isolate. I changed my work plans, shopping habits, and travel plans so that others would not get sick. I wanted to protect myself and others. This time period of Covid 19 has been not just a test of clinical resources, but of our willingness to put ourselves out for others. It seems that suddenly the need for virtue was front page news.

I wondered – would we be willing to put ourselves out for others? Would we be virtuous to protect others?

And now I look at our current situation in our country and I am sadden to say that not all the people in the USA are willing to put themselves out for others! I see many people not being virtuous to protect others!

It can be hard to consider others' needs while we are anxious about our own. Thankfully, we are not left with willpower alone to meet the need.

We can ask the Holy Spirit to give us love to replace our indifference. We can ask the Holy Spirit to give us joy to counter sadness. We can ask the Holy Spirit to give us peace to replace our anxiety. We can ask the Holy Spirit to give us patience to push out our impulsiveness. We can ask the Holy Spirit to give us kindness to care about others. We can ask the Holy Spirit to give us goodness to see to their needs. We can ask the Holy Spirit to give us faithfulness to keep our promises. We can ask the Holy Spirit to give us gentleness instead of harshness. And we can ask the Holy Spirit to give us self-control to lift us beyond our self-centeredness.

While we will not be perfect at all of this, we are called to seek the Holy Spirit's gifts of virtue regularly.

Holiness is the ability to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. And such holiness is needed every day, especially during this pandemic!

Do we have the capacity to make sacrifices for the sake of others?

The fruits of the Holy Spirit can be broken down into two categories:

#1 - those traits that exist out of the agape love of Jesus Christ - love, joy, peace, and kindness.

#2 - the traits that seem to show themselves best when we are able to control our own will and allow the Holy Spirit and the will of God to guide our lives - patience, faithfulness, gentleness, generosity, and self-control.

Let us first focus in on the agape love of Jesus Christ - love, joy, peace, and kindness.

Can anyone of us remember the very first time that we felt love? Come on, does anyone want to share? For most people, love begins when their mother holds them in her arms for the first time. But to actually recall when we first felt love is a different matter all-together.

When the group 'Still Surfing', a Beach Boys band played on the Boardwalk this past summer, I remembered my first crush – Rhonda Young. In 10th grade we were in several classes together and being that we were near the end of the alphabet, we sat close to each other. She came from Roosevelt Junior High School and I came from Stevens Junior High School so we did not know each other until we came to the same high school – Williamsport High School.

She was beautiful and very early in our 10th grade year I fell in love. I would talk to her (I was not a shy one!) I would write her notes (I was the romantic type) I would allow her to copy my Trigonometry work and she would allow me to copy her Biology work. I probably ask her out one million times that year. She always said – I just want to be friends!

Oh, you may now be wondering how the 'Still Surfing' Beach Boy band made me remember her. I bet you I sang 'Help my Rhonda, Help, Help Me Rhonda' to her each day for almost the whole school year!

Being in love is wonderful!

God demonstrates love to us in so many different ways in the Bible. The ultimate act of God's love is Jesus' willingness to submit to his crucifixion on a cross.

The Bible can be summed up in two words - God loves!

In 1 John 4:19 we are told - 'We love because God first loved us.'

Agape love is that expression of love that expects nothing in return. Although it may be difficult for us to remember the first experience of love in our life, there is no doubt that we recognize the love that comes from the Holy Spirit.

We must recognize the love that is found on the communion table, the Lord's Table. Here on this table are two symbols of Jesus' ultimate love for us. That fact that he suffered and died for us even though he was sinless. The fact that Jesus made himself our burnt offer so that we would no longer have to go to the temple to make a burnt offer to God. Christ paid our debt in full!

And finally, let us focus in on the second category of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The fruits that show themselves best when we are able to control our own will and allow the Holy Spirit and the will of God to guide our lives - patience, faithfulness, gentleness, generosity, and self-control.

These fruits are very often hard for us to possess. In a culture that wants everything NOW, patience is hard to possess. In a culture where money makes the world go around, faithfulness is hard to possess. In a culture where might makes right, gentleness is hard to possess. In a culture where greed is rampant, generosity is hard to possess. And in a culture where the louder and out of control you are seems to gain you popularity, self-control is hard to possess.

Oh, my friends, the fruits of Holy Spirit - patience, faithfulness, gentleness, generosity, and self-control – are very hard to possess. But with God's help, Christ's example, and the Holy Spirit's guidance; we can possess these fruits of the Holy Spirit!

So, how are you tending to your fruits? How are we tending to our fruits?

Let us pray:

O Holy Spirit, fill us with the power to do what needs to be done. Fill us afresh today and make us a person of virtue.

O God, may we never stop the work of justice. Let us realize that great gift that comes from us bearing fruit together. Let us fulfill your divine purpose for us. May we remain ever fruitful. May we seek not the immediate victory over our adversaries but may we accomplish a lasting victory that unites us in a banner of love of you and your most Holy Son, Jesus Christ. AMEN.