

PNEUMA - THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT
A SERMON BASE ON GALATIANS 5:13-26
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2019
10:00 a.m.

By their fruit you will recognize them.

I love these words of Jesus.

They clear up a lot of confusion.

People can say pretty much anything.

Words are easy.

Words can, and this is just the greatest word, obfuscate.

Words can make something muddled, unsure, cloudy.

Someone can say they are a really good baker.

They can talk a good script about recipes and reductions.

But how do you know?

What comes out of the oven settles the matter.

By their fruit you will recognize them.

Someone can say they are a really good singer.

They can tell you about how they own the room

at karaoke every week.

But onstage, pitch, tone, range demonstrate otherwise.

Someone can say they are generous.

They can give a broad story

about what they are doing for others or for the cause.

The giving line in their personal budget,

the charitable deduction line on their tax return

and the time marked off on the calendar

brings clarity.

By their fruit you will recognize them.

Someone can say they are kind.

But how they treat their family,

Their attitude to coworkers,

The posts they publish online

reveal something quite different than kindness.

Jesus' words harmonize with the quote

attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson,

'What you do speaks so loudly, I can't hear what you're saying.'

By their fruit you will recognize them.

Jesus paints a picture of it.

Do people pick grapes from thorn-bushes,

or figs from thistles?

Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit,

but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit,

and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

By their fruit you will recognize them.

We tell people we are Christians, followers of Jesus.

What definition are we bringing to them?

Are they just words we say?

What is the fruit they pick and taste when they see our lives.

Beyond our words, what has brought clarity to them

about what a follower of Jesus looks like?

Can they begin to understand Jesus

because of what they see in you? in me?

Can people see Jesus when they look at us?

We have some serious work in front of us

when it comes to overcoming the negative impression
the public has of Christians.

In a world where Westboro Baptist Church in the U.S.
gets all the media attention for picketing

seemingly every and any event with signs filled with hate,

In a world where Christians are known more for what they are against
than what they are for

In a world that believes the church is not only irrelevant
but predatory

Well in that world,

we have a serious work in front of us to overcome

such a negative picture of what a follower of Christ looks like.

Who we are speaks loudly, defining the term Christian for others.

This can be our demise.

On days when we have been cranky and snippy and short.

On days when we have been harsh and critical and even mean.

On days when we have been catty, or distant, or aggressive,
or passive-aggressive, or selfish

Hearing someone say to us,

'I thought you were a Christian.' can sting.
As it probably should.

People are watching us.

Because they are curious about our language and culture.

The Christian faith is a mysterious unknown for many now.

We live in a world there are now those don't even realize
that Christmas and Easter come from the church,
much less what they celebrate.

In identifying ourselves as followers of Jesus,

people will watch, to see what a follower of Jesus looks like.

'What we do speaks so loudly,
they can't hear what you're saying.'

It can be our demise.

But it could be our credibility.

They will watch you at the grocery store.

They will watch how you drive.

How you speak to your kids.

How you treat your spouse or partner.

By the fruit of your own life, people are defining Christians.

In identifying ourselves as followers of Jesus,

they will experience you and what a Christian is

as they interact with you about your kids,

as they manage you at work,

or conduct your medical test,

as they see how you drive

and as they overhear you at the restaurant.

What do they experience?

What are they seeing that speaks so loudly it overpowers your words?

They will see one of three possible things.

One - they will see absolutely no difference between themselves
and Christians.

If we are making the same lifestyle choices,

are no different in how we raise our kids,

are in no way different in how we spend our time,

or our money,

if the environment in our homes,

if our credit card statements and calendars
look just like everyone else's,
if we are no more, or no less polite
or decent than everyone around us
then we warrant the criticism,
'Who are you to tell me I should meet Jesus?'
'You are no different than me.'
'You are no better than me.'

Or two - and worse - they will see harm from a Christian.

They will see a harsh and hating attitude
toward those who don't conform to what they say is right.

Or Christians who are hostile and aggressive to those
who aren't in alignment with their views

They will see people being dismissed because they are of other
faiths or no faith.

Or, or hopefully a third possibility.

Peter describes a third way in his letter to the churches

that were in the areas of what is now modern day Turkey.

They too were struggling with public impressions of them.

The world then didn't know what to do with this new religion,
these Christians.

They didn't know much about them. Misinformation swirled around.
It was possible they were cannibals.

Something about eating the body and blood of the founder.

It was possible they were sexual deviants
having something called love feasts.

They were incestuous,
calling everyone brother, and sister.

They were upsetting the economic order,
declaring everyone free in Christ.

Which was the last thing you wanted your slaves to hear.

Christians had an image problem.

1 Peter is a letter that describes for new Christians

what a life of following Jesus needed to look like,
especially in a world that doesn't understand what a Christian is.

Peter points out, it is a new life we are living.

It is different and it should look different.

Peter said

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,

God's special possession,

that you may declare the praises of him

who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God;

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, as strangers in this world

to abstain from sinful desires,

which wage war against your soul.

Live such good lives among non Christian that,

though they accuse you of doing wrong,

they may see your good deeds

and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Live such good lives that they end up glorifying God

despite their accusations.

It is Paul writing to the Galatians that tells us how to live these good lives.

We don't do it on our own strength.

We do this by living life empowered by the Spirit,

by keeping in step with the Spirit.

We do this letting our lives be guided by God's Spirit.

But a life guided by the Spirit is not,

just following every impulse and calling it the Spirit.

It is not just doing whatever comes into your head.

How will you know if you are living by the Spirit?

By their fruit you will recognize them.

Paul tells you what that fruit looks like, and what it doesn't look like.

He says, first off, the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command:

'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

A first way to measure if you are being guided by the Spirit

is to ask yourself,

"Is what you are doing loving your neighbour?"

If it is, you are likely in step with the Spirit.

Then Paul says, live by the Spirit,

and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit,

and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh.

They are in conflict with each other,

so that you are not to do whatever you want.

The acts of the flesh 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.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Against such things there is no law.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus

have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Does what you are doing fit into one of those nine
qualities of the fruit of the Spirit.

Is it loving, joyous, peaceful, forbearing, kind, good
faithful, gentle,

Does it show self-control?

If it is, you are likely in step with the Spirit.

You will be recognized by the fruit your life is producing.

Jesus said, you tell a plant by the fruit it produces.

Is it a pear tree or an apple tree. Look at the fruit.

You can see if you are living by the Spirit,

if your life is producing the fruit of the Spirit

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Against these, there is no law.

You can exercise these without limits.

Use these,

you won't end up imprisoned, or in the spiritual jail

of hatred, addiction, jealousy and division.

There is freedom

in living by the Spirit of God,

in keeping in step with the Spirit of God.

Living by the Spirit,

producing this fruit doesn't happen without effort.

It takes all the same resolve, mindfulness and discipline it takes

to get to the gym, or to practice your lessons,

or learn any new skill.

It takes discipline and hard work and intentionality.

Living by the Spirit doesn't just happen.

Without intention, we drift.

It is true in our personal lives.

It is true in faith.

Which in our at times 'my diet starts tomorrow' mindset

is not what we want to hear.

We want our faith, to be a nice God-supplement,

a nice flavour shot to an already full life.

We are called however,

to a faith that produces fruit, that reveals Christ.

We are called to produce fruit

that identifies and reveals Christ in our context,

in our families, in our workplaces,

in our schools, in our friendships.

We are called to a faith that can say no

to ungodliness and worldly passions,

and yes to the life of service and self-sacrifice

and character of Christ.

We are called to be in step with the Spirit,
producing fruit of the Spirit.

Some might consider that limiting, the opposite of freedom.
But it is actually a very freeing way to live life.

I like to make the analogy to fish.

You could say that fish are very constrained and limited by water.

They don't have the freedom to be up on the beach,

enjoying the sunset,

or to go for a run in the park,

or maybe a hike through the forest.

Fish are very constrained by water.

They don't get to do whatever they want,

whenever they want,

however they want.

We could think a fish should have that freedom.

But a fish out of water will die.

And a fish has an entire ocean to swim in.

There is a lot of room to swim in a life in step with the Spirit.

Can I ask you?

When you think of a time when you, or someone you know

lived to do whatever they wanted,

whenever they wanted,

however they wanted,

how did that work out for them?

How did it work out for the people around them?

Were they ultimately freer?

The fruit of the Spirit teaches us and disciplines us

to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions,

by saying yes to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

It makes us able to swim and breathe in this

huge ocean of life

God has given us

Living by the Spirit,

being in step with the Spirit means being free.

Free to become and to be

who God has made you to be.

Loving. Joyous. Peaceful. Forbearing.

Kind. Good. Gentle. Faithful. And Self-Controlled.

Free to become and to be people recognized as followers of Jesus,

because their lives produce the fruit of the Spirit.

Amen.