

June 5, 2022, Pentecost Sunday

Living By The Spirit Galatians 5.16-26

Jill and Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

Hello, I know I'm not the Scalise you're expecting to be preaching today. I'll tell you why I am. On Tuesday, Doug spoke on the phone with his friend and colleague in ministry Ben Feldott who's the Senior Pastor of Cape Cod Church in Falmouth. Ben was on his way to Mass General Hospital in Boston where his wife Tammy had been admitted several days before with a brain tumor. Tammy was scheduled for surgery the next day, Wednesday, June 1, and Ben asked if Doug could possibly preach today at Cape Cod Church. Doug conferred with Joe Greemore, and with me, and I agreed to share today's message so Doug could help at Cape Cod Church on what is an important Sunday for their church. This is a way to support our friends & co-laborers for Christ. We are thrilled to share that Tammy came through her surgery well & miraculously is already home. By the way, Cape Cod Church's last service is at 11:00 so if you also want to hear Doug preach on "Don't Live & Learn, Learn & Live", you can head to Falmouth by car or by computer after worship.

In a sense, this is a fitting Sunday for me to participate as we're including our children and students in worship today and, along with Tim Kautz, I've been teaching the senior high Sunday School class. Looking back over the years at BBC, I've taught preschool, elementary school, and senior high. In all of these classes, we've talked about the fruit of the Spirit, which happens to be a foundational scripture for me.

In the Brewster Baptist Church year, today we are exploring the book of Galatians as we continue our journey through the Bible. Paul writes to the churches of Galatia (Turkey) with an emphasis that a person becomes right with God by faith in Christ, not by good works or ritual observances.

In the Western Christian Liturgical year, today is also Pentecost – the day when the church remembers the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the first followers of Jesus in Jerusalem. People often associate the Spirit with outward phenomena like a mighty

rush of wind on the Day of Pentecost & folks hearing of God's deeds of power in their own language, or people speaking in tongues, or other dramatic behavior. Paul says in Galatians and elsewhere that there is much more to living in the Spirit than those manifestations. Including the choices you and I make everyday.

Do you like to take hikes or walks? As many of you know I enjoy hiking on trails...in Brewster, in Vermont, in any country where I may travel. Numerous times I am going down a path and then there's a junction, a decision of which way to go.

In our journey through the Bible, we've seen God repeatedly present a contrast between two paths and how each person has to choose which way to go. At the end of Joshua 24:15, Joshua says to the people, " Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve..., but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Psalm One describes the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. Proverbs contrasts the way of the foolish and the way of the wise. Jesus in Matthew 7 talks about the broad way that leads to destruction and the narrow way that leads to life.

Then in the writing of the Apostle Paul in Romans and Galatians we hear Paul describing two ways of going through life. You can live according to the your selfish desires (called the flesh) or according to the Spirit. Paul says the flesh and the Spirit are opposed to each other. Doug shared a story with me of how Pastor Stuart Briscoe visited a man who was a shepherd and he watched how his two dogs helped to guide and herd the sheep, but, at some other moments the two dogs engaged with each other, trying to assert which was dominant. Stuart Briscoe asked the shepherd which dog usually won. The shepherd replied, "The one I feed the most."

This is also true for us when it comes to the flesh – our selfish desires, and the Spirit. Whichever one you feed more will grow stronger and come to dominate your life. You fill yourself with the Spirit by feeding on the things of the Spirit like reading or listening to the Bible, prayer, & fellowship.

Listen to Galatians 5.16-26:

“Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.”

When I read or listen to this passage, first, I think of people who I’ve known who embody the fruit of the Spirit...my grandmother, BBC members through the years, folks I see right now. I can remember how good it felt to be around them. I am grateful for the ways they have blessed my life and mentored me. Who do you think of? Another one of my thoughts is which list would people who know me well say more closely describes me? Which of these lists do I want to describe my life? Paul says, “the works of the flesh are obvious,” if a majority of the behaviors described in 5.19-21 (jealousy, anger, strife, dissension, envy, drunkenness) are present in a person’s life, then Paul continues, it’s obvious that person doesn’t have the Spirit, isn’t living as a Christian. & he states starkly & clearly, “I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” It doesn’t matter what a person says, or claims in their Twitter bio. Paul says look at his or her life & behavior & you know the truth.

About two years ago, during the pandemic, at a time when there was a lot of vitriol and mean accusations by groups in our country, including by people saying they were doing

so in the name of God. I found myself getting very upset, angry, and even depressed when I read or heard the news. I didn't know what to do, found it hard to pray, or to center myself. So, I did something new as I walked in the morning. I memorized and started repeating Galatians 5:22-23 to myself while I walked. "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things."

I repeated the words and focused on each one. Love, joy, peace.. What does this look like in my life? How can I live this out today? I can still picture myself walking up the hill, repeating the verse day after day, whenever I was feeling upset and overwhelmed by everything going on in the world. This scripture grounded me, connected me to God, and somehow, the Holy Spirit began making a change in my life. Not necessarily in the outside world, but in my response to the world. An inner transformation. By focusing on the fruit of the Spirit, I felt a sense of control, of agency in my life. Regardless of what situation I experienced, I could focus on living out the fruit of the Spirit.

If you're led by the Spirit, Paul says, you're not under the law. He means we don't follow a list of rules to earn our salvation. We know that following a checklist of do's and don'ts can't save us. Our Christian life is not about following a rule book. Instead, it's about God's Spirit filling our hearts. When God's Spirit fills and guides us, our life is transformed. This transformation starts from the inside and pours out of us. Our motivation isn't to earn God's favor. Our motivation is a response of love to what God has done for us. We want to love others. We want to be patient. We want to be kind. We want to do all of these things because God has changed us. God has changed our outlook and our thinking. We want to share with others what God has shared with us.

If we live by the Spirit & are guided by the Spirit, our life will look very different than a life dominated by selfishness and sin. If you are wondering what path you are walking on, remember we talked about choosing paths earlier. Sometimes you start down a path, then maybe the trail narrows or goes a different direction than you thought, & you're not sure if you're going the right way. What do you do? A Boy Scout, Girl Scout or experienced hiker looks for the trail blazes, the markers on trees, to find the trail. If you

are wondering what path you are on, or if you need to get back on the right path. In spiritual terms, you can look for the fruit of the Spirit, the trail blazes, to guide you.

The nine virtues that are expressions of the fruit of the Spirit all enrich our lives & relationships. A few years ago in the Senior High class we looked at how these characteristics intertwine and are seen repeatedly in Scripture. These qualities are also found in the Trinity: in God the Father, in Jesus Christ the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

LOVE - John 15:9

Notice the similarities between Paul's description of love in 1 Cor 13 & the fruit of the Spirit. "Love is patient. Love is kind, love is not envious, or boastful, or arrogant, or rude." In John 15 Jesus says "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love."

JOY - John 15:11

Jesus continues in John 15 - "I have said these things to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

I appreciate Henri Nouwen's description of joy:

"Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing—sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death—can take that love away.

Joy is not the same as happiness. We can be unhappy about many things, but joy can still be there because it comes from the knowledge of God's love for us. . . . Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in God our refuge and our safety and that nothing, not even death, can take God away from us."

PEACE- John 14:27

In John 14 we hear Jesus share, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

PATIENCE OR LONG SUFFERING - KJV EX 34:6-7

In Exodus 34 Moses and the Lord are on Mount Sinai:

"And the Lord passed by before him (Moses), and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping

mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty;”

KINDNESS- Col 3:12. In Colossians 3, Paul writes:

“Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.”

GENEROSITY OR GOODNESS- Acts 10:38

In Acts 10 Peter shares “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”

FAITHFULNESS- Psalm 100:5

Again and again, faithfulness is used to describe God in the Hebrew Bible. For example from Psalm 100, “For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, his faithfulness to all generations.”

GENTLENESS- Matt 11:29

In Matt 10 Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

SELF CONTROL - Proverbs 16:32

From Proverbs 16 “One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city.”

Think about how the fruit of the Spirit are evident in the life of Jesus. In how he treated his disciples, the hurting, the sick, the outcast, even his opponents, we see all the virtues of the Spirit in full maturity in Jesus, even when he was slapped in the face.

(John 18:22-23) “When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” Jesus answered, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” How is that for self-control?

Many of us have a favorite summer fruit – strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, watermelon, peaches – each has a unique color, texture, flavor, and shape. In a similar way, each of the fruit of the Spirit blesses and enhances your life, your relationships, the church, the community, and the church’s witness to the world in a unique and special

way. How would your life be different and diminished if any of the fruit of the Spirit were missing or lacking? If you didn't experience joy or kindness for example?

On the other hand, do you know anyone who has more peace or goodness in her or his life than she or he needs? I don't. We all need and can use more of these spiritual virtues. How do we cultivate them? Spend time with God. Ask the Spirit to fill you anew each morning. Memorize the list of the fruit of the Spirit & say them to yourself daily. Call them to mind as you go through your day & interact with others.

When we are living in the Spirit, and bearing the fruit of the Spirit, we are being Imitators of Christ. Do you recall those WWJD bracelets? This is what Jesus would do. This is what your life looks like when Jesus is living in your heart.

In closing, I'd like to take you back to the path imagery. Remember when I shared about hiking in the woods and choosing a path. When we talked about the fruit of the Spirit being trail blazes to both direct you & to help you discern if are on the right path, the path of the Spirit. The fruit can also be used to check the credentials of a trail guide.

Jesus said a tree is known by its fruit. Matthew 7:15-20 (NRSV)

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits."

Doug is fond of saying, "What God wants is spiritual fruit, not religious nuts." What God wants to see in all of our lives is the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of a vital and growing relationship with the Lord.

One can ponder how our lives and how our culture might be different if millions of Christians committed themselves anew this Pentecost Sunday to being fully led by the Spirit & producing with the power of the Spirit a bumper crop of spiritual fruit; of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. May God grant that as a body of believers we will experience such fruit in abundance.

Let us pray: Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on us. Melt us, mold us, fill us, and make the fruit of the Spirit evident in our lives. Amen.

Blessing for Pentecost by Joyce Rupp

May the enthusiasm of the Spirit leap incessantly within you & help you to live a vibrant life.

May the warmth of Spirit's fire be extended through your concern & care for all those who need your love.

May the blaze of Spirit's courage enable you to speak the truth & to stand up for respect, dignity, & justice.

May the undying embers of Spirit's faithfulness support you when you feel spiritually dry & empty.

May the strength of Spirit's love sustain your hope as you enter into the pain of our world.

May the clear light of Spirit's guidance be a source of effective discernment & decision-making for you.

May Spirit's patient endurance be yours while you wait for what is unknown to be revealed.

May the steady flame of Spirit's goodness within you convince you every day of the power of your presence with others.

May the joyful fire of Spirit dance within you & set happiness ablaze in your life.

May the spark of your relationship with Spirit catch afire in the hearts of those with whom you live & work.

May you be mindful of the Eternal Flame within you.

May you rely on this Source of Love to be your constant ally & steady guide.

And All God's people said, "Amen!"

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. What is a summer fruit you really enjoy and look forward to eating this time of year?
2. What is "the flesh?" Why do you think Paul lists, although the list is not exhaustive, deeds of the flesh?
3. If you look at the list of vices and notice that you often fall into one or more of these sinful behaviors, what should you do?
4. By contrast, what does it mean to live by the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit, and to be guided by the Spirit as Paul asserts in Galatians 5.16, 18, & 25?
5. Why does Paul encourage us to cultivate the virtues known as the fruit of the Spirit?
6. Paul says, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Which of these do you think people who know you well would say is most evident in your life? If you're in a small group, encourage one another by sharing what you see in each person.
7. Which of the fruit of the Spirit do you feel you need to work on the most?