

Fruitful Living: Love  
Galatians 5:22-23; I Corinthians 13:4-7; John 13:35  
June 1, 2008 10AM  
Pastor Draeger

Grace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus, Amen.

Well on this first day of June we start a new sermon series. A series that's going to look at the 'Fruit of the Spirit.' It's going to be a nine week series including today -- because there are listed in the text for today, nine fruit of the spirit. Paul writes: "the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control; against such things there is no law."

What's interesting is as we look at this text, something occurred to me not so many years ago, something that was just a matter of grammar. As you look at this verse, the main verb in the sentence starts out with "is." And if you look at that verb from what you remember from your grammar studies, that is singular. What's wrong with that? There are a lot of things following it. You would expect that the 'Fruit of the Spirit' - *are*. Now either the Holy Spirit doesn't know his grammar or there was some intentionality behind the word *is*. And since I believe these things are Spirit driven, and He's not so stupid. He existed with the Father from eternity. So He must know what He's doing when He inspires Paul to write these words.

So let's ponder this for a moment. The 'Fruit of the Spirit' is not nine things from which you can select your favorite ones. This is not like eating out of a salad bowl (and one of my favorite things is to avoid things like broccoli and cauliflower). And in spite of the fact that my parents taught me better, I still pick out the things that I don't like. You can't do that here, can you? Because there aren't nine different things and you can't select from those nine different things and say well I'll take a lot of love and joy, that's kind of cool. Patience, I don't need a lot of that, and self control -- never going to happen. No, we don't get to pick and choose because these nine expressions of 'Fruit of the Spirit' are fruit of our spirit, our new nature in Christ. Paul is contrasting here in Galatians the works of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit. And it's very clear in the original language that that's exactly what he's doing. Translators I believe, mistakenly put an uppercase **S** on the word spirit here in this text. In Greek, you didn't have uppercase letters at the beginning of sentences or things like that -- they just didn't do that. So everything was lowercase so you'd have to figure out editorially, where is the uppercase and where is the lowercase.

But as you study theologically the book of Galatians, and you contrast and compare that to the book of Romans where Paul does talk about spirit and flesh, and when you compare and contrast that to words of Jesus when He's talking to Nicodemus. What He says to Nicodemus about baptism, "that which is born of flesh is flesh, that which is born of old nature is old nature, and that which is born

of *the* Spirit is *spirit*.” And there is no article in front of the *spirit* the second time which suggests that it’s not that the Holy Spirit gives birth to the Holy Spirit., It’s the Holy Spirit who gives birth to *our* spirit because we’re spiritually blind, dead and enemies of God. So we need to have a jump start from the Holy Spirit so that we can have something called spiritual life and get back to the days when God created Adam and Eve, who were created in a perfect way. And Adam who was a lump of clay, God breathed into him the breath of life and Adam became a living being. In other words he became a spiritual being quite different from the squirrels in our back yard or the blue jays that dive bomb them. They do not have a spirit, but we do. But because of the fall into sin, now we are spiritually blind, dead and enemies of God, and we need a new nature. So the Holy Spirit jump starts us in what we call the washing and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, words from the apostle Paul to Titus; talking about baptism.

Now that we have the spirit life, what does the spirit life look like? It looks like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control. So when you’re growing in spirit life, these nine things are realities for you. You don’t get to pick and choose and say well I don’t want that one. We’re going to look at each of these nine characteristics of spirit life over the next eight weeks and today would make nine. And as we do that we want to be mindful that the first one up there is love. That should be a fun one to talk about, right? Everybody likes love, it’s a good word.

I kind of remember way back when I think I had the first notions of what love looked like. I was probably in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade and there was this girl named Meryl. She had pigtails and I loved to pull them, and I would show her I liked her by punching her. Isn’t that such a boy thing? Pretty early, rudimentary kind of love, isn’t it? Well, if you look at Hallmark cards, it really hasn’t changed much since then. Hallmark cards have kind of that same notion about what love is. And that’s not all, the Bible word for love -- the Bible has three different words for love, and we talked about that a few weeks ago when we talked about “God so loved the world,” and we kind of teased that out. So, a reminder of just how that goes. One of those words is the word *Eros*, and of course we have erotic from that. That love in the Greek mind at that time and even to this very day, is a sexual love. It’s what’s in it for me; what do I get out of it? How’s that for self-centered? *Eros* doesn’t see the other, *Eros* only sees me. So it is the kind of thing that I do not do anything except satisfy me. It’s about conquering, it’s about controlling. It’s not about *you*, that’s *Eros*.

And then the Greeks had a word that described other qualities of humans, and that is we like people, be kind of friendly, and so the friendly kind of love is the word *phileo*. And is the word you find in this country in Pennsylvania -- Philadelphia -- because that’s the kind of love it is - the love of brothers. I like you; we’ve got something in common; we can hang out together. So it’s kind of the love that people enjoy when they get together with friends. We share a common interest, we have a good time, we play pinochle together, we play

bridge together, we play softball together, we play baseball together. We do these things together then we go out and drink beer afterwards. That's *Phileo*.

Then there's a third word, the word that is used to describe God in the Bible. The word that describes what God wants of His people in the Bible, and that word is *agapao*. That's a kind of love. It's a *love in spite of*. I love you in spite of how I feel, I love you in spite of what you did, I love you in spite of who you are -- that's God's love. His love for us is *in spite of*. It's fueled by the needs of others. See God so loved the world -- the world that was far from Him -- that He took action in a purposeful, intentional kind of way. He took deliberate action. God so loved the world in spite of their sinfulness, their waywardness. He would search out Adam and Eve in the garden and say, "Adam where are you, what's this that you've done?" He wasn't doing this as a judge. He was doing this as a loving father seeking out His wayward kid. And some of you as parents understand that, where you've been there for the wayward kid and you just stayed pat on your love in spite of their behaviors. That's the love that God says is His love.

I just heard the word love again yesterday in one of those contexts where you normally expect to hear it. We had a wedding service here and they picked 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, chapter 13 for one of the scripture readings. We call that the great chapter right in the center of 12 and 14 in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, and here it is - 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:4. "Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast. It is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, it always trusts, it always hopes, it always perseveres."

Just to give some new perspective to that, I'd like to ask you to join me in looking at that this way. Wherever you see love is or something like that, would you replace it with something like 'I am?' Let's go back to verse 4 again, let's try this. I am patient, I am kind, I do not envy, I do not boast, I am not proud. I am not rude, I'm not self seeking, I am not easily angered, I keep no record of wrongs, I do not delight in evil but rejoice with the truth. I always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere. How does that work? I can tell you, it's not me. I can identify with you guys. How about when you get really tired, you have a lot of stress in your life, how easy is it to be that way? It just isn't, is it? It's really hard, and to be that way 24/7. God's that way 24/7, and He calls us to this kind of love. He says the fruit of the spirit is this life of love that does these things for people. That lives outside of yourself, that lives for others in a such a way that you have this kind of passion to be with them, to care for them, to love them without condition.

Jesus, when He wanted to boil things down for His disciples, when asked what's the greatest commandment, He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind, strength and to love your neighbor as yourself." So if you want to chunk that down in 4 words, it's simply this -- *love God, love people*. That's essentially how He summarizes the Ten Commandments. But if you want to

really boil it down, make it really, really simple, we do this because *God is love* -- the Bible boils that one down for us too in the book of John, 1<sup>st</sup> John. He says God is love, that's it. In fact in Galatians chapter 5, we have these words, words that immediately precede the text for today, he says, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." That's the one thing that counts. More than anything else, this is what counts. Faith expressing itself through love.

So I'd like to just ask you this little question. Rewind your life over the last 10 years, do a quick scan of the last 10 years and let's ask the question: how have you grown in the last 10 years? Well, maybe your bank account has grown, possibly your waistline has grown, like some of us maybe your forehead has grown. How's your love over the last 10 years? How's that been? Has love been growing? Different question, isn't it? Lot more fun when you're looking at my forehead, but when I asked you about your love, you got quiet and thoughtful, because all of us stand guilty, don't we?

One of the things I think God is calling us to do is to love differently -- to love as He has loved. To love in a way that counts, that makes a difference. And I suspect for everyone of us we would say, that's really what I'd like, I'd like to let my life look like the 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 piece. I'd like my life to show up, that my love would look like that. I'd like the 'Fruit of the Spirit' love not to be just one among many, I'd like that to stand out. And when people see the face of my diamond, that's one of the faces they see; that they see how the love of God changes lives including my life.

What's interesting when Jesus was with His disciples, one of the last things He said to them I'm sure they remembered. I know that John remembered this one, and he had a little help from the Holy Spirit as well, but John remembered that wonderful servant passage in John 13, we have these words that I think are rather interesting, and it's good to pause on them for a moment and just listen. "A new command I give you, love one another." Frankly that's not a new commandment, that had been around a long time, that had been a part of the Talmudic tradition. So when Jesus says love one another, this was not brand new, this was Old Testament stuff too as well as in the *Shema*; so it wasn't brand new. So how does He get off saying this was a new commandment? Because of what follows - the words that follow tell us what's new about this commandment. He puts it in a brand new context, he says a new commandment I give you, that you love one another *as I have loved you*, so you must love one another. That's what's different. It's His love for us that defines how we love others. That same kind of self-sacrificing love, that same kind of intentional love, the love that keeps no records of wrongs. The love that would come to Peter after the resurrection when Peter had denied Him three times, and He asks him, "Peter do you love Me?" Not once, not twice but exactly three times. That's the unconditional, life-changing love of a Savior who came into the world to take upon Himself the sins of the planet, including yours and mine, so that we might have the forgiveness so

that we would be empowered to love with His kind of love, because you can't do it without Him.

Love as I have loved you. Love the unlovely, love the unloved, love the untouchables, love the unwanted. I suppose Jesus could say just watch Me with little kids. Remember how the kids came to Jesus and was tugging on His robe, and what did the disciple say? Get them out of here!! Don't bug Jesus, He's too important, He's got business to take care of here! And what did Jesus say? Let the kids come to Me, don't forbid them. Frankly the kingdom of heaven is like that, unless you come as a child tugging on My robes you have no place there. That's a different way of seeing it. He was very, very approachable. His love is an approachable kind of love, it's a love that will let the lepers come and touch Him. The woman who was unclean because she had this flow of blood could touch His garment and He wasn't upset. In fact He says of her, there's no greater faith around than this woman's. He's the one who would hang out with the woman at the well at noontime. Knew all about her life and did not condemn her, didn't reject her like some of the men in her life had already done, and treated her as trash. But instead He loved her, He was approachable.

How's *your* approachability? When members of your family come to you, when friends come to you, when co-workers come to you -- how approachable are you? Do you get like the disciples and say no, stay away, don't have time, I'm too busy? Real love loves everybody - rich people, poor people, beautiful people, not so beautiful people, celebrities, nobodies. It loves other races; it loves democrats, republicans, independents. It treats everybody as better than me because of what God does for me in Jesus Christ. Paul says in Philippians 2, "Consider others better than yourselves." And then he says, "Have this mind among yourselves," which is yours in Christ Jesus. So this is how to think -- think Jesus think -- think Jesus think.

How approachable am I? Do I lead people by intimidation? Do you always have to watch my reactions? Do others find me as someone they can talk to? Am I approachable? Well, if we're loving what Jesus loved, He is the ultimate approachable person. He approaches the world in a manger in Bethlehem. He approaches us from a cross and an open tomb. He approaches you and me in the waters of Holy Baptism. He approaches us in the simple words of Holy Scripture. He approaches us today with His very body and blood for the forgiveness of our unlovingness. He says "I forgive you. Not only do I forgive you, I want the power of My love to be yours so that you can live this way -- not on your own but connected to Me."

It's interesting the way Jesus puts it and it's paraphrased in the Message Bible. And as most of you know I'm not so hot on paraphrases except that sometimes they're kind of devotionally good, but they're not the place where I want to hang my theological hat. But this is a good devotional thought, so I want to read to you from the Message these words of Jesus that are rather compelling. He says,

“Here’s another old saying that deserves a second look, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Is that going to get us anywhere? Here’s what I propose, don’t hit back at all. If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, gift wrap your best coat and make it a present too. If someone take unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the life of a servant. No more tit for tat stuff, live generously. You’re familiar with the old written law; love your friend and it’s unwritten companion, hate your enemy. I’m challenging that, I’m telling you to love your enemies; let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for then you are working out of your true selves, your God created selves. This is what God does, He gives His best; the sun to warm, the rain to nourish to everyone, regardless the good, the bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anyone can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run of the mill sinner does that. In a word what I’m saying is grow up. You are kingdom subjects, live like it! Live out your God created identity, live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

Those are the last words of the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, the Sermon on the Mount. He comes to us with a gospel that will change our lives. In fact, I’d like to suggest that He wants to change us in such a way that we see everyone as people who are potentially available for our ministry of love. I like the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt. These words were on a plaque, “A test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have too much. It is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.” And right next to that plaque is this scene; it’s the employment line, the food line during the depression. And what’s interesting is that some of the students of Redeemer spontaneously got in line. They were standing with them. Isn’t that what Jesus does with us? He stands with us in our food line of life. He stood with us in the waters of baptism, in the Jordan River, He stood with sinners. He stood with you in your baptism; He stands with you in this Sacrament of Holy Communion today. He stands with you when He says, “Lo I am with you always to the close of the age.” He stands with you. Paul knew that so he said, “For me to live is Christ, it is not I that live but Christ who lives in me.”

If that’s true and we stand with the people, who needs some love, family members, co-workers, neighbors, people at the Seneca Hotel, Maple Street Shelter, Mexico, Hong Kong, Rwanda; we stand with people because Jesus stands with us. Not just for us but with us as Risen Lord. We love when we are available and approachable. When we slow down enough and stand with folks.

One of the things that strikes me about our culture is how much we have by way of resources to stand with people to communicate, to connect. We have cell phones, we have e-mail on our Blackberries and other kinds of instruments. We have all kinds of ways to be with people. And one of the things that’s so amazing

to me is we also use them as ways of staying distant and not connecting in a personal way. It's a lot easier for me to e-mail Bill than to pick up the phone and call him and have a conversation. They even call these e-mail exchanges conversations; I'm not sure I buy that because way too much is left out in the keyboard.

I'd like to just encourage you to be available -- to be aware of love, it's not an option, it's just not an option. It's not one among many. I'd like you to be an apprentice, like the famous TV show. I'm not so sure I want to be like Donald Trump, I'd rather be like the journeyman of Jesus, who had been an apprentice carpenter and knew how to be a journeyman for His disciples -- those living two thousand years ago and those living today. Let's get close to that journeyman so that our apprenticeship looks like Him. So that we have the 'Fruit of the Spirit' growing in us; all aspects of it beginning with love.

Can we do 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 one more time? Let's try it once again - Because of God's love for us, because of the refreshment we're going to receive in the sacrament of Holy Communion, because of the experience of His love let's do this thing together, "I am. I am patient, I am kind, I do not envy, I do not boast, I'm not proud, I am not rude, I am not self-seeking, I'm not easily angered, I keep no record of wrongs. I do not delight in evil, but rejoice with the truth. I always protect, I always trust, I always hope, I always persevere" because that's what Jesus does and Jesus is in you. True? For me to live is Christ, so let's live His love purposely, Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep and guard both your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.