

**“Good Fruit”
Galatians 5:16 – 26**

¹⁶“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

¹⁷For the sinful nature 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.

¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”

I’ve always had a sense of the spiritual, the supernatural even though I come from a non-church, non-Christian, atheist upbringing. The things of God didn’t feature or were belittled.

Yet I just knew that there was another world alongside this one that we can see.

And so my seeking, searching began alongside an awareness of the dark entities in this realm.

One of my first encounters with the spiritual realm was with these dark entities where an event occurred in my life where I can only describe as waves of fear that entered my being and gripped my heart. I became a fearful, scared, anxious young person. It was awful

Then on the first Christian youth camp I ever went on about six months after becoming a Jesus follower. It was like no other time in my life. It was fantastic in so many ways: great speakers and great sung worship and excellent day time activities.

But best of all was the nights: after the speaker all the chairs at the front were cleared away and an invitation was given. One, for those who never committed their lives to Jesus and two, for those wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit showed up; there were words of knowledge and prophecy over these young people's lives. Some began to speak in tongues. Some cried. Some shook. There was even deliverance from evil spirits.

(Christian youth camps are so tame these days ☺). Most of all there was joy and enthusiasm that did not wane quickly.

Then often on Sunday mornings and evenings the same opportunity was extended again the Holy Spirit showed up. The fruit of this was so many people experienced a closer, more intimate relationship with God and life-change. For me one area of many, that fear that crippled my life was driven out and replaced by the Spirit of God who gives peace and courage.

Is the Spirit's work always so outwardly striking?

Or can it be quietly happening but as equally dramatic in outcomes?

"Rangi had a wretched background: 20 bitter years of rejection, drugs, gangs, prostitution and fractured relationships. Rangi came into our lives as a neighbour, then a friend, at a point when he was re-assessing his life. There appeared to be a spiritual openness. He was lonely, and most days wanted to talk. Over the weeks, the Word was gently seeded into his life. He was lent a New Testament, and he began to devour it. The Spirit prompted some to pray for him. One night, on his own, Rangi prayed to become a Christian.

The next day he asked "Does God somehow speak into our thoughts? Today I was sitting in the car at the lights and I was about to yell and curse at a woman – but suddenly I felt like God was telling me not to. Does that happen?"

"What did you do?"

"I said 'sorry' to God. Is that the right thing to do?"

Rangi then interrupted himself, and asked: "these flowers in this garden, how long have they been there?"

"The whole time you have lived here."

"No, I have never seen them before. They're beautiful."

For the next few days, as he drove around on his Harley, Rangi saw the beauty of the world like he had not seen it for a long time.

A few days later, Rangi unilaterally decided to come to church. He was too shy to come in. A young man spotted him hanging around outside, and coaxed him in. Many in the congregation enfolded Rangi in their love, and the church became his whanau.

A few months on, Rangi very movingly gave account of faith in Christ. I had neglected to brief him on the appropriate responses to the baptismal vows: to the three questions he answered “for sure”, “sweet as”, “no sweat”. Later, Rangi’s past caught up with him, and he went to prison. The congregation prayed for him, visited him weekly, and eventually welcomed him back.”¹

Many people too have grown up in Christian families.
Eventual though a decision was made to that this is no longer my parents faith or even my grandparents faith, but my own.
For some that happens in the bedroom.
For many it happens at camps.

However it happens, what has happened in those moments, we come into this beautiful relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
We are made children of our Father in heaven.
We receive pardon through His Son and come under His kingship, his good rule.
We receive love, acceptance and grace like we’ve never experienced before.

And something else happens as well – we receive new life.
Another life can comes to live in our lives and that life is the Holy Spirit.

Last week was we talked about the Holy Spirit, who he is and what he does.
We talked about how God the Holy Spirit enters into our life and makes the Christian life possible.
He takes all the amazing, wonderful things Jesus has done for us and makes it real in own hearts and lives.

You and I, we need the Holy Spirit.
Most of all the Holy Spirit is Someone to be experienced, and He is Someone to be enjoyed.

I mentioned too in passing that when the Spirit is at active in our lives He does a multi-dimensional work.
We receive enabling to give witness to our faith.
We are given gifts, not natural abilities that arise out of who we are but out of who He is.

We can also experience radical life-change, like Rangi.

And that’s what our passage picks up on this morning.

¹ Stuart Lange, “Does Christian Conversion Still Occur”, *Candour Magazine* 4 (2006), 21.

There is fruit of a changed life that the Spirit produces in us.

These virtues, these attributes - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – are evidence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives to bring about the good, to bring about the best.

He doesn't want to extinguish your personality – some people really fear that – He wants infuse these your personality and character with Himself. Christ's character and conduct becomes reflected in our own lives.

This is part what is referred to in theological terms as the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

And who wouldn't want to say "Yes!" to that.

But we know simply from experience that's not always easy. And Paul gives an honest assessment of the human predicament.

"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..."

There is a conflict in your life and in my life.

Now, when Paul's is talking about the "flesh" he is *not* talking about our human physicality.

I mean, Jesus himself we're told in John chapter 1 became flesh and blood and dwelt among us.²

And when he rose from the dead, Jesus wasn't just a spirit; he had a body. You can read about that at the end of Luke chapter 24.

Then when he ascended to his Father, again it was as a person with a human body.

Your body matters and what you do with your body matters.

So here, when Paul is talking about the 'flesh', it's a term that refers to our fallen condition, our lower nature, that is in rebellion to God.

Another way of putting is this: there are some people who are living a *self*-referencing lives, where they call the shots. It's all about the self.

The acts of the sinful nature is to have a self-referencing life where it's about pleasing yourself.

So we find areas that we people in our world today would struggle with.

² John 1:14

Sexual immorality. There *is* something, for example, called “sexual immorality” among consenting adults. There is a line, and we could debate where that line is, but the line is there.

There’s debauchery, which it’s like someone has thrown off any restraint, anything goes, especially in the sexual area.

There’s idolatry; taking the things – even the good things – of life and making them ultimate things, central to your happiness, meaning and purpose.

There’s witchcraft, which is a catch-all phrase for engaging with unseen but very real malignant, spiritual entities.

But it’s not just the ‘big’ stuff.

I mean, it talks about areas that some people don’t even blink an eyelid at: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness... and the like.

In another letter Paul talks about bitterness and greed and slander and anger.

And these come with a warning:

“I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Now, at this point, some Christians get concerned.

They say, you know there are times when I have not been at my best self.

They worry that their lives are sabotaging them, that their future is under threat.

When you live self-referencing life, these traits can become *fixed* in our lives.

It’s like someone has jealousy, but then because they haven’t dealt with it, they become jealousy.

It becomes ingrained in who they are and how they operate.

So that’s the bad news.

There is good news.

Paul reassures us that when the Spirit of God resides in us – when we live *Christ*-referencing life - there will be these virtues, these attributes that make your life beautiful.

The Holy Spirit takes who Jesus is and makes it real in our lives.

So here’s the question:

“How do you tell if the fruit of the Spirit is growing in your life?”

What’s the measure?

Where do you look?

One is by doing some navel gazing.

"I'll spend some time reflecting on the state of my life, and I'll pick up on them"

There is some value in that with the Spirit's help.

But the fruit that the Holy Spirit intends for lives is contrast with 'acts' of the flesh. In other words, these character qualities, these virtues, ethical traits, these divine attributes have to have legs on them.

Someone has pointed that perhaps one way to read this is that the fruit of the Spirit is love:

Love expressed as joy

Love expressed as peace

Love expressed as patience

Love expressed as kindness

Love expressed as goodness

Love expressed as faithfulness

Love expressed as gentleness

Love expressed as self-control

So what I've found is that that true test for whether the fruit of the Spirit is in your life is found in community – with others.

Take patience - older versions use the word 'longsuffering'.

A couple of years ago I was heading to the Super Rugby match in Hamilton. By far the fastest way was through the Karangaheke Gorge. We were a fair way through it when the traffic came to a standstill. There had been a serious accident and cars were turning around, and as they came past they said there would be at least a two hour wait.

So I had to turn around and go back through the and go over the Kaimai Ranges. You suddenly notice how slow other drivers are! 60 in a 70 Km zone. 70 in an 80 km area.

(If that's you, please don't do it – I don't know how much more patience I can grow 😊).

For you it might be at... the supermarket.

We've all been there.

You come to check out time and, if you have more than 12 items, you look to see which row is going fastest.

Come on, confession time! 😊.

So you pick a queue and you watch the other queues...

Then you that a person that would have been behind you is on their way!

Then another. And you then you notice the person and the check-out operator are having a grand catch up about Aunty Mertle.

It's found in the significant relationships.

If you want to know where there are growth areas, if you have a significant other – and if you're feeling courageous – ask them. Your response will be revealing.

Or if you have a child or an parent.

A teenager will probably tell you.

The fruit of the Spirit found in community – with others – and especially this community called the church.

It doesn't take long to be in a church community and find yourself disappointed.

And it's not even the grievous stuff that reaches the media.

It's people who've been saved by sheer grace trying to walk the road of life following Jesus.

Sometimes it's a group of people you want to be done with – and then you're reminded that the fruit of the Spirit is... love and faithfulness.

It's also when we have those difficult people in our lives.

I mean, it's easy to be kind until someone is unkind to you.

It's easy to think you're peaceful presence until someone until someone is antagonistic in your life.

And you might be that difficult person.

I'm a competitive person by nature and in the Summer months, touch rugby was my game of choice.

If my teammates stuffed up, I let them know! I didn't swear at them, but I didn't hold back either. I was not kind, I was in fact very unkind and actually quite harsh.

I say that to my shame.

What about in your worst moments.

In your best moments it is easy to breeze along.

It the tough, terrible moments, stuff rises to the surface.

So what do you do?

The fruit are not the fruit of trying hard.

They are the fruit of *the Spirit*.

If you “walk by the Spirit... you will not gratify the desires of flesh”

You have to ask, what is Jesus drawing your attention to through His Spirit, even this morning?

When it came apparent that I was not a good, patient, kind person on the sports field, I had to pay attention.

I had to go to Jesus for pardon, for forgiveness – and actually to some others – and ask forgiveness.

Alongside that I had open up those areas to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to do His in me.

Now I am a more patient, kind person on the sports field.

To put it another way, you’ve got to become a gardener.

You’ve got to nurture the good of the Holy Spirit.

It’s means being attentive; it’s means asking this other Life to bring His life into the areas where need you to grow. It’s doing that which you need to do to see the fruit grow.

I’ll finish with this: what season are you in?

What better place to talk about fruit than Cromwell (maybe Roxburgh...😊).

As you well know, fruit are seasonal and so there are certain times of the year when you look forward to say, apricots or nectarines or peaches or plums.

And though for us the fruit of the Spirit are every day and all year round, I do think there are some times in our life’s – some seasons – when certain fruit of the Spirit are to come to the fore or the Spirit wants to grow a greater amount in that area.

Is it a season where there’s a relationship in your life where a fruit of the Spirit needs to come to the fore?

Is it season of struggling through with a difficult person in your life, or if you are honest you’re the difficult person at the moment...

The Lord, the Spirit, hasn’t finished with you, He hasn’t finished with you.

He wants to make you into a beautiful person, and if you are a beautiful person, He wants to make you even more beautiful.

So what is the Spirit saying to you this morning?