

1 Sermon, August 18, 2013

Texts: Colossians 1:9-12, Matthew 7:15-20

Title: "The Rewards of Christian Faith: The Fruit of the Spirit"

1. Oranges for Christmas – fruit as a reward
2. Fruit of Spirit as a reward, but not something you try for
3. You shall know them by their fruit
4. Fruit is not about accomplishing – Chuck Wise
5. Watch out! Your fruit is showing!

1. Oranges for Christmas – fruit as a reward

One of my most vivid memories is that of opening stockings on Christmas morning. Every year there would be an enormous orange, bigger than an orange any other time we had them. It was so bright and pretty, and I enjoyed that orange and looked forward to it.

Still, to this day, I will use fruit as kind of a reward. If I've had a long day, I may have a piece of fruit as a bedtime snack as kind of a reward for getting through the day.

2. Fruit of Spirit as a reward, but not something you try for

If you remember — this is part of a sermon series about the rewards of Christian faith. Two weeks ago, we talked about how Jesus criticized those who made a big deal of their faith in public. He said, "they have received their reward."

That means that the rewards for real Christian aren't so public.

One of those rewards of Christian faith is what's called fruits of the Spirit. These are listed out in Galatians 5 as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Those fruits are not really a reward, as in something you earn. They are not a prize for successfully accomplishing Christian faith. Rather, those fruits are a by-product of living for God.

Still, even though you can't earn them, they are something that makes life sweeter, and are rewarding in that way.

If someone were to come and ask you what's so great about being a Christian, what would you say? Well, you could say that there are fruits of the Spirit. Things that are the result of faith.

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3. You shall know them by their fruit

I had a great-uncle named George Knutson, my grandmother's brother. George was a conservative Baptist pastor. Once, when my grandmother was talking to George about faith, she said that only God knows who will be saved. George disagreed. He said, "You will know them by their fruit."

Yes, uncle George claimed basically that he could tell who was going to be saved and who was not. And he was applying today's passage from Matthew, which tells us to be aware of false prophets.

Uncle George was on the lookout for false prophets.

But if you know people by their fruit, what does that fruit consist of? Well, some scholars, Saint Augustine among them, have claimed that good fruit was right doctrine.

To other interpreters of the Christian faith, good fruit was found in the life of the person. It was a matter of how they lived. This fits in better with the whole idea of patience and kindness being fruit.

Besides this, John the baptizer said: "bear fruit worthy of repentance." To repent means to turn your life around, not just change your mind.

For that matter, Jesus didn't seem to speak so much about doctrine as about action.

Oh, I think there are false prophets, those who would lead us to believe that Jesus rewards us materially for our faith, with big homes and fancy cars and stuff. And there are preachers who are saying that on television.

There are false prophets who tell us that they know the secret of when Jesus will come again, or are ready to promote violence as a means to an end.

False prophets are the ones who tell us that it's about *us* and our money, or our goals or our rights. But it's not about us, it's about God.

4. Fruit is not about accomplishing – Chuck Wise

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Spiritual Fruit is an organic output of who you are, combined with the grace of God.

We can't help but produce fruit if we're faithful.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. But it's not limited to the list.

Fruit is different than specific things you've done. It's different than accomplishing things.

One example of this is a man I knew named Chuck, a wise man who passed away recently. Chuck was devoted to his wife, who developed Alzheimer's at an early age. He did everything he could to keep her out of the nursing home, and then when she had to go in, he was there every day.

Chuck was a very capable man, who had been an administrator in a large non-profit organization. But it was not his accomplishments that made him a wonderful Christian and an amazing human being. He devoted his life to other people. He was humble, didn't complain, and often praised others. The fruit of the spirit were evident in Chuck.

It was not anything in particular that he did. It was just who he was.

You know people like that. I know people like that here in Columbus, but it's not fair to mention one person you know without mentioning many others.

You know, I spend a lot of time on various projects: Vacation Bible School, Choir, preaching, visiting, writing newsletter articles, planning worship, and so on. I work hard to accomplish things. But in the long run, I'd rather be measured by my fruit than by what I've gotten done

Who do you know who really gets this?
Someone who has a fruit-producing life?

I'm sure that the person you know by their good fruit lives a life of prayer and hope. I'm sure that this person doesn't make him or herself the center of the universe. Instead, the priority is given to others, especially those who can't do things for themselves.

5. Watch out! Your fruit is showing!

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The people who show the fruits of the Spirit may not even be aware. You see, it's like a fish not being able to tell where the sea is. When it's part of who you are, you may not even notice.

So, whether you like it or not, your fruit is showing.

Whether it's good fruit or bad fruit, others are looking at you not for what you can do, but who you are.

In fact, God looks at your fruit, too. God wants you to have good fruit, fruit that gives joy to others.

It's kind of like those oranges in the Christmas stocking. They were meant to give joy.

Go and be likewise.

Amen.

"For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light." Colossians 1:9-12, 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." Matthew 7:15-20, NRSV.